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A Phenomenological Case Study
of Teacher and Student Descriptions of the Use of Read-Alouds in Middle School

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
In partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
Curriculum and Instruction

by

Alyson Theriot

B.S. Nicholls State University, 1993
M.ED. Nicholls State University, 1996

May, 2018

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To my parents, my number one cheerleaders— Thank you for raising me to be kind and compassionate. Those qualities mean the most in my career path-education. You have always been there for me, and I am so extremely grateful to still have you both by my side. Mama, the original Dr. T., you have and always will be my biggest role model. Thank you for instilling in me a love of teaching! Dad, my fishing buddy, thank you for always giving me a chance to escape the hustle and bustle of life so we could appreciate a good fishing trip together. I love you both.

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Abstract

It has been common for elementary teachers to read aloud to their students; however, it has not been so common in the middle school. The purpose of this phenomenological case study was to examine how middle school teachers and their students describe the use of read-alouds, including the teachers' reasons for conducting read-alouds and the students' descriptions of their experiences with them. Individual interviews and observations were conducted with two teachers and six students to gain the essence of their experiences with read-alouds. Results from this study indicated that what students gained from read-alouds matched the reasons their teachers utilized them. The students described their experiences as enjoyable, helpful to independent reading, motivating, engaging, and a learning opportunity which were all reasons their teachers stated for reading aloud. Findings in this study also indicated the fidelity with which read-alouds were implemented by teachers was impacted by district mandates and the pressure of preparing students for state tests. Results indicated students prospered both cognitively and affectively from listening to teachers read aloud. This study can be used to inform middle school teachers and administrators of the value of using read-alouds.

Keywords: Read-Alouds, Middle School Teachers, Middle School Students, Middle School Reading

Chapter I

Introduction

In this chapter of the dissertation, I will provide:

- a personal reflection that will detail and bracket the experiences which influenced the development of my interest in read-alouds,
- an overview of the problem statement,
- an explanation of the purpose of this study,
- a list of research questions,
- definitions of important terms, and
- insight into the conceptual framework used in this study.

Personal Reflection: My Own Experiences with Read-Alouds

I started my career in education as a second grade teacher at Raceland Lower Elementary. I taught all subjects to my students in a self-contained elementary classroom. One of the most enjoyable pedagogical strategies for me was reading aloud to my students during reading class and across other curricular areas. I always enjoyed bringing the books to life by using different voices and expressions while reading. During this time, I noticed that when my students spent time in our reading center, it was common for them to engage in the same books that I had read aloud to them in previous lessons. They seemed to be drawn to the same stories that I used for my read-alouds.

Ten years into my career, I accepted a position at Nicholls State University as an assistant professor of reading. The classes that I taught focused on literacy, and the student population was composed of undergraduate education majors. Recognizing that modeling reading aloud was as important as teaching about this strategy, I made it a habit to begin and end every college lesson

with a read-aloud. My students seemed to enjoy the practice. I witnessed them laugh, smile, and sometimes shed a tear during the readings. Several years into my career as a college professor, I started receiving messages from former students describing one of their read-alouds and explaining how much their own students displayed enjoyment of the same stories I had read in our college classes. I received messages from elementary, middle, and high school teachers about their successes with read-alouds. This is what first sparked my interest in learning more about existing research on the value of utilizing read-alouds.

What I learned from my earliest exploration of literature on read-alouds was that most of the research that existed was conducted in elementary settings. I found very few research articles on the use of read-alouds beyond the elementary years, yet my former students who are now teaching in middle school and even high school were reporting positive results with read-alouds in their classrooms. This is what has led me to the journey of researching read-alouds in the middle school setting. Merriam (2009) asserted that “prior beliefs about a phenomenon of interest” should be set aside or “bracketed” (p. 25). This personal reflection serves as a way to make my own beliefs and experiences with read-alouds transparent.

Statement of the Problem

The National Reading Panel (NRP) was organized in 1997 to review research-based knowledge on reading instruction. A report by the panel concluded that effective literacy instruction includes an emphasis on the following components: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and text comprehension (Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2001). Since this report, and even before, educators consistently sought methods that effectively boosted children’s reading ability. The use of read-alouds is one practice that targets several of the five areas of literacy instruction as identified by

the NRP; however, this instructional approach has been limited to use in the elementary schools. Serafini and Giorgis (2003) suggest that the “predominance of reading aloud occurs in the primary grades, rather than in intermediate, middle or high school classrooms” (p. 6). Even though the use of read-alouds has primarily been limited to the elementary classroom, there may be benefits to extending this practice beyond the elementary years.

As early as 1985, the Commission on Reading cited teacher read-alouds as “the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading” (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985, p. 23). Since that time, numerous studies have been conducted on read-alouds during the elementary years; however, little research has been done on read-alouds in the middle school classroom (Albright & Ariail, 2005; Layne, 2015). There is a need for research on the use of read-alouds beyond the elementary classroom.

The few studies conducted on the use of read-alouds with older students conclude that there may be some value to this pedagogical practice. Possible benefits include exposure to good reading behaviors, increased test scores, and pleasurable experiences with literature (Albright & Ariail, 2005; Durham, 2014; Serafini & Giorgis, 2003). Further research on the practice of read-alouds in the middle school is needed to provide evidence that read-alouds are a valuable pedagogical experience for students. Layne (2015) who is a leading researcher and teacher in the field of education who promotes the use of read-alouds across all grade levels states it simply, “More research needs to be conducted with older students” (p. 7). This study attempted to narrow the gap in the literature on read-alouds in the middle school by describing read-alouds from both the teachers’ and students’ perspectives.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe middle school teachers' use of read-alouds in their classrooms and middle school students descriptions of teacher read-alouds as an educational experience. I sought to discover any benefits read-alouds offer to the participants. Furthermore, I analyzed the similarities in the teachers' and the students' descriptions of the use of read-alouds. Thus the main research question under study was:

How do teachers and their students describe the use of read-alouds in middle school classrooms located in South Louisiana?

In order to answer the main research question, two sub-questions under study were:

Why do middle school teachers use read-alouds in their classrooms?

How do middle school students describe their experiences with read-alouds?

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions were used.

Read-aloud. A read-aloud is defined as a systematic and explicit method of reading aloud where the teacher models vocabulary development, reading fluently, and comprehension strategies requiring the students to join in the discussion, thus becoming interactive participants in their own learning (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006).

Middle school. Middle schools are defined as schools that educate middle grade students that include young adolescents between the ages of 10 and 15 (grades 5-9) who are undergoing rapid and dramatic changes in their physical, intellectual, social, emotional and moral development (Guillory, 2014).

Conceptual Framework

Researchers agree that a conceptual framework is developed to guide a researcher through the research process (Berman, 2013; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Merriam, 2009); however, the definition of a conceptual framework is not as easily agreed upon. Merriam (2009) defines a conceptual framework as “the underlying structure, the scaffolding or frame of your study” (p. 66). Berman (2013) proposes that a conceptual framework is a “tool for conceptualization” that is utilized in the research process (p. 1). Bloomberg and Volpe assert that “there does not appear to be a uniform or consistent definition” for a conceptual framework (p. 87). Although there is some ambiguity in the terminology utilized, the importance of a conceptual framework is precise in the literature. More importantly, the lack of a conceptual framework in a research study can result in a study that is “weakly conceptualized, under theorized, and less generative of quality data” (Bloomberg & Volpe, p. 87). These researchers stress the importance of having a strong conceptual framework for a research study.

A conceptual framework should be grounded in the current literature. Merriam (2009) suggests conducting a thorough literature review of the topic one wishes to research in order to identify a conceptual framework. Merriam (2009) further suggests that the conceptual framework of a study “will draw upon the concepts, terms, definitions, models and theories of a particular literature base and disciplinary orientation” (p. 67). As such, to best identify the conceptual framework for this study, I reviewed literature on the topic of read-alouds.

In my own experiences with read-alouds, I view the process as one having cyclical qualities. The teacher selects a particular book to read to the class for specific reasons. Among the most common of those reasons is for the purpose of modeling. Albright and Ariail (2005) support this claim in a study conducted on middle school teachers’ use of read-alouds by stating

that the most common reason given for the teachers' use of read-alouds was "to model aspects of fluent reading, such as pronunciation, intonation, rhythm and style" (p. 584). The book selected for the read-aloud can be selected for various, purposeful reasons. Layne (2014) suggests that when selecting books to read, it is important for teachers to "become articulate educators who have a rationale for why, when, where and how" they make these selections (p. 56). Finally, the experience the students receive from the read-aloud can be advantageous to their learning and ultimately can lead to the teacher's continuous use of this strategy. In a study conducted by Durham (2014), which focused on middle school reading specialists' views on teacher read-alouds, she concluded that "through the use of teacher read-alouds, middle school students learn and see the characteristics of effective and engaged reading" (p. 156). The teacher, student and book used during a read-aloud are all important factors to the process. This process is one that is grounded in both Bandura's social learning theory and Rosenblatt's reader response theory.

Bandura's Social Learning Theory

The terms motivation and modeling appear consistently throughout the literature on read-alouds. The cyclical, read-aloud process involving the teacher, the book and the students is grounded in the social learning theory. Bandura's theory has an emphasis on learning in a social context with modeling and motivation as important aspects (Bandura, 2005). His theory provides a framework for the pedagogical practice of a read-aloud and all of the factors involved.

Bandura's social learning theory places an emphasis on modeling as an important proponent to cognitive development. He refers to this process as observational learning. Observational learning requires two types of stimuli—imaginal and verbal (Bandura, 1969). Imaginal stimuli occur through imagery formation during the modeling process (Bandura, 1969). Bandura (1969) explained that "during the period of exposure, modeling stimuli elicit in

observers perceptual responses that become sequentially associated and centrally integrated on the basis of temporal contiguity of stimulation” (p. 220). The images formed by students during the observation of the modeling process are ones that can be recalled at a later time when the model is absent. What the teacher does in terms of good reading behaviors during the read-alouds provides these visual stimuli for students. The verbal stimulus during the modeling process is also provided by the teacher. What the teacher does with his or her voice during the reading provides verbal stimuli for the students. According to Bandura (1971), the verbal stimuli will have a greater impact on the observational learning than the visual stimuli. While Bandura (1969) explained these stimuli to be central to the learning process, there are various subsystems that play a role in observational learning. These are defined as attentional, retention, motoric reproduction, and incentive or motivational processes.

Attentional processes. The first subsystem to observational learning is attention. The learner must be attentive to the modeling process in order for any cognitive development to occur. Bandura (1969) proposed that having students observe “is no guarantee that they will attend closely to the cues, that they will necessarily select from the total stimulus complex only the most relevant stimuli, or that they will even perceive accurately the cues to which their attention has been directed” (p. 222). Furthermore, Bandura (1971) proposes that “a person cannot learn much by observations if he does not attend to, or recognize, the essential features of the model’s behavior” (p. 6). The teacher has to purposefully draw attention to the important aspects of both the reading processes and the elements of the story being read aloud.

Motivation levels of the learner play a role in this subsystem. Bandura (1971) asserts that “models who possess interesting and winsome qualities are sought out, whereas those who lack pleasing characteristics tend to be ignored or rejected, even though they may excel in other

ways” (p. 7). The teacher’s ability to conduct an enjoyable read-aloud will play a role in the motivational levels of the students. In addition, book selection contributes to the level of motivation the learner will experience during the modeling process. Layne (2015) suggests that teachers select books based on their students’ needs and interests. By selecting the right books and providing an exemplary model of reading aloud, teachers can increase students’ attentional processes during this activity.

Retention processes. Retention of the behavior observed is the second subsystem to observational learning. This is mainly affected by the learners’ ability to rehearse the behavior observed (Bandura, 1969). “People who mentally rehearse or actually perform modeled patterns of behavior are less likely to forget them than are those who neither think about nor practice what they have seen” (Bandura, 1971, p. 7). In the case of read-alouds, engagement of the learner during the read-aloud process is of utmost importance to ensure that retention can occur. Furthermore, the activities the students engage in following read-aloud times can enhance their retention processes if they are offered the opportunities to practice what was observed.

Motoric reproduction processes. When the learner is successful at both paying attention and retaining information from the modeling process, their ability to reproduce the observed behavior is enhanced. Bandura (1969) asserted that “responses of high-order complexity are produced by combinations of previously learned components which may, in themselves, represent relatively intricate compounds” (p. 224). Additionally, Bandura (1971) informs that “if he [the observer] possesses the constituent elements, he can easily integrate them to produce new patterns of behavior, but if the response components are lacking, behavioral reproduction will be faulty” (p. 8). In the case of read-alouds at a middle school level, it is expected that most students have made the transition from learning to read to reading to learn; however, the reality is basic

components needed in order to gain the most from observational learning have not always been fully developed in the learner. This means that while some middle school students possess the basic reading elements required in order to successfully reproduce what has been observed during the read-alouds, others may not.

Incentive or motivational processes. Bandura (1969) emphasized the importance of having favorable incentives and positive reinforcement in order for observational learning to emerge into action. Learners need to have motivation in order to want to repeat the performances being observed. As related to read-alouds, the amount of observational learning that takes place is affected by the motivation levels of the students and possible external incentives offered by the teacher.

Social learning theory graphic. Bloomingberg and Volpe (2012) explain that a researcher's conceptual framework can be "presented graphically as a model that represents the overall design of a given research project" (p. 90). With this in mind, Figure 1 is a graphic representation of the cyclical read-aloud process in relation to Bandura's social learning theory. The factors in the study—the teacher, book, and students—are important factors pictured on the graphic. The theory that drives these factors, Bandura's social learning theory, is centered on the graphic representing its centrality to the entire process of the read-aloud.

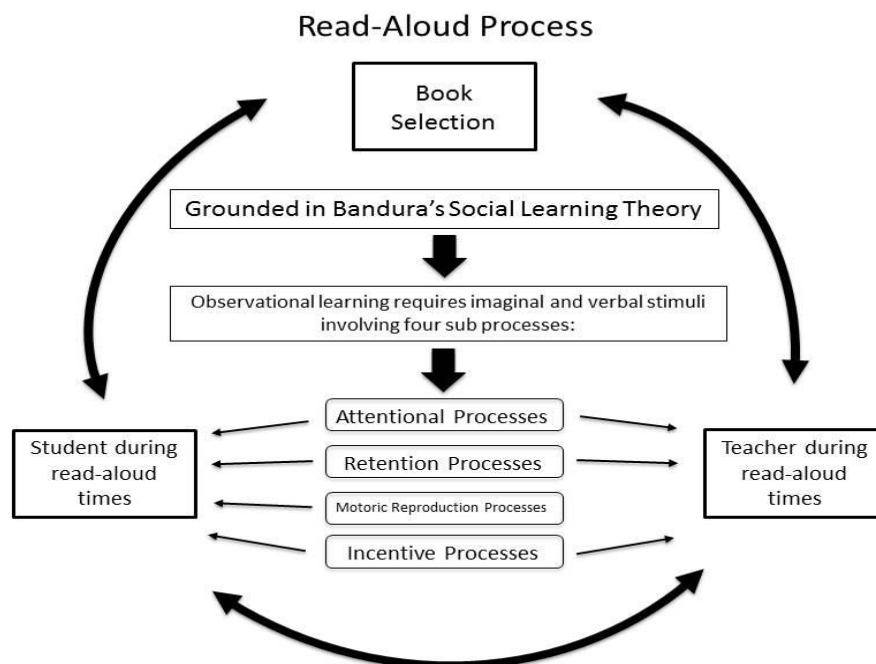


Figure 1: Read-Aloud Process. Observational learning requires two types of stimuli: imaginal and verbal. Imaginal stimuli are the pictures students create in their heads during the read-aloud and verbal stimuli are provided by the teacher during this time. The sub processes related to the learner are the attentional, retention, and motoric reproduction processes. The incentive process can be provided by the teacher. How the whole process of the read-aloud takes place plays into the teacher's next book selection for upcoming read-aloud activities in the classroom.

Bandura's social learning theory provided one framework for this study. The researcher conducted this research with a focus on how data and results related to this theory. These relationships are further explained in Chapter 5.

Rosenblatt's Reader Response Theory

The study was also grounded in Rosenblatt's reader response theory. Rosenblatt (1978) described the interaction between written works and a reader as a transaction. "Reading is a transaction, a two-way process, involving a reader and a text at a particular time under particular circumstances" (Rosenblatt, 1982, p. 268). In this particular study, the students' transactions occurred through the listening to texts rather than through reading.

The reader. Contrary to earlier beliefs of reading in which the reader was “cast as a passive recipient, whether for good or ill, of the impact of the work,” Rosenblatt (1978) suggested the reader plays a critical role in creating meaning from text (p. 4). She explained how each reader or listener brings “his past experiences and present personality” (p. 19) to the transaction that contributes to the uniqueness of each person’s experiences with text. The reader must be active in this process, and the amount of attention given to interpreting the text and feeling the words affects what the reader takes away from the reading. “The words in their particular pattern stir up elements of memory, activate areas of consciousness,” explained Rosenblatt (1982, p. 268). The reader’s memory of what has already occurred and attention to the details in the text play a role in how the rest of the text will be interpreted. The reader can also continue interacting with texts by reflecting on what has been read. Taking part in read-alouds, the students in this study were able to actively bring a part of themselves to the experience, making the experience unique yet similar.

The text. The text itself adds to the transaction. Rosenblatt (1978) described the text as “a series of signs interpretable as linguistic symbols;” however, she made it clear that it is “not simply the marks on the page or even the uttered vibrations in the air” (p. 12). The text is also the emotional response it creates in the reader. The text cannot be overlooked as being a critical component, rather the words are what “guides the reader’s performance” (p. 15). The arrangement of the words on a page, the punctuation used, and word choice are considered to be important to the transaction as they could ultimately lead to different interpretations by the reader. Additionally, the genre of the writing, the style, format, and organization of a text, and the nature of the content are all textual features that contribute to the reader’s response during reading. While the reader is considered vital to the interpretation of text, the text itself is “the

author's means of directing attention of the reader," and thus the text should not be thought of as an object but rather as an event waiting to happen (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 86).

The transaction. While the reader and the text are described above, they both create the meaning of the transaction, and as Rosenblatt (1982) explained, "one cannot predict which text will give rise to the better evocation—the better lived-through poem—without knowing the other part of the transaction, the reader" (p. 269). The transaction is an active process that can be an utterly different experience for each reader involved. What the reader brings to the transaction—past experiences, emotions, desire, and what the text offers the transaction—style, rhythm, content, are all factors in this transaction that ultimately lead to the reader's stance.

The stance. Readers adopt a stance, or purpose, when engaging in this transaction that falls on the aesthetic-efferent continuum. In efferent reading, "the reader's attention is focused primarily on what will remain as the residue after the reading—the information to be acquired, the logical solution to a problem, the actions to be carried out" (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 23). In contrast, Rosenblatt (1978) described aesthetic reading as a transaction in which "the reader's attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text" (p. 25). The focus here is less on what knowledge can be taken away from a reading transaction but more on what feelings and associations are aroused within the reader.

One book can be read for both efferent and aesthetic purposes, and Rosenblatt (1978) explained that the stance taken on by a reader has the potential to fall within the two stances on a continuum:

Actually, no hard-and-fast line separates efferent—scientific or expository—reading on the one hand from aesthetic reading on the other. It is more accurate to think of a continuum, a series of graduations between the nonaesthetic and the aesthetic extremes. The

reader's stance toward the text—what he focuses his attention on, what his “mental set” shuts out or permits to enter into the center of awareness—may vary in a multiplicity of ways between two poles (p. 35).

The transaction amongst the teachers, students, and text within this study can fall on this continuum, and how the read-aloud is delivered by the teacher and received by the students are contributing factors. Within the cyclical read-aloud process, both the student and the text are central. As this study described the essence of the read-aloud experience from both viewpoints, teacher and student, reader response theory provided a basis for analyses of the experiences.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Introduction

The National Reading Panel (NRP) was organized in 1997 to review research-based knowledge on reading instruction. A report by the panel concluded that effective literacy instruction includes an emphasis on the following components: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension (Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2001). Since this report, and even before, educators consistently sought methods that effectively boost children's reading ability. The use of read-alouds is one practice that targets several of the five areas of literacy instruction as identified by the NRP; however, this instructional approach may be underutilized with older children. The use of read-alouds has primarily been limited to the elementary classroom even though there are benefits to extending this practice beyond the elementary years. Utilizing read-alouds beyond the elementary years is a fairly new idea that is gaining popularity in the reading world.

This literature review is separated into the following sections: procedures for conducting effective read-alouds, benefits of read-alouds, motivation to read, read-alouds as a pleasurable experience, underutilization of read-alouds, and using read-alouds with older students.

Procedures for conducting effective read-alouds. Read-alouds are typically utilized in elementary classrooms as a pedagogical practice to enhance young learners' literacy acquisition. To describe what is meant by pedagogical practice, Van Manen (1991) provides a description of the concept as a relationship. "The teacher intends the students to learn and grow with respect to the kinds of things that the teacher teaches. In turn, the students need to have a desire, willingness and preparedness to learn" (Van Manen, 1991, p. 77). In other words, pedagogical practice refers to both teaching and learning. Since read-alouds involve a teacher reading aloud

to students, there are several criteria that add to the overall effectiveness of this practice. One important aspect of this practice is that the reader, the teacher, shows enthusiasm during reading (Johnson, 2002). To ensure that enthusiasm be part of a read-aloud, the reader should take time to carefully select appropriate reading material. According to Johnson (2002), picture books are cited as being one of the best resources for read-alouds. One reason is that picture books often contain many visuals that can certainly be appealing to visual learners (Newsum, 2003). Picture books have also been shown to help students become more strategic readers (Blasingame & Goodson, 2001). Stories that are funny and entertaining also work well as read-alouds (Goldfinch, 2002). In addition to selecting the reading material, readers should take time to familiarize themselves with the reading selection. Erickson (1996) suggests that the reader take time to practice reading the selection several times before presenting to a class. Carefully selecting the book to read aloud and practicing the actual read-aloud are important to the execution of this practice.

Another criterion for the materials chosen to read aloud to students is that the reading selection be of interest to the audience and that attention be given to the time of day the read-aloud is conducted. Blessing (2005) suggests the best time of the day to read to students is at the beginning or ending of a class period. The read-aloud should last no longer than 15 minutes (Erickson, 1996). The time of day and length of the read-aloud play important roles in keeping the audience's interest. Stories that reflect different cultures are suggested to pique the interest of a diverse audience (Erickson, 1996). Blessing (2005) asserts that allowing students to doodle during the reading can help keep their interest and foster their ability to develop story images. The reader should also pay careful attention to providing pauses during the reading that allow students to discuss the story events (Erickson, 1996). Conversation and making predictions

during reading can also help to keep the interest of the audience. Holding the students' interest during the read-aloud is an important aspect of this practice and will have an impact on the students' attentional processes during the activity. The teacher should select books to read-aloud based on the interests and needs of the students (Layne, 2015).

Reading selections can also achieve educational purposes beyond the goals of literacy. Many picture books possess positive qualities that make them perfect for teaching students about personal values (Newsum, 2003). Studies have shown that both fiction and nonfiction book selections have proven useful in character education programs (Newsum, 2003). Both picture books and nonfiction books should be used for teacher read-alouds. Albright and Ariail (2005) report that read-alouds help students make meaningful connections between literacy learning and their own lives, and the motivation and engagement in literacy activities can be improved when teachers utilize read-alouds with middle school students. While many picture books offer the reader an opportunity to teach the audience both literacy acquisition and personal values, careful consideration needs to be given to book selections. Some picture books contain themes that are mature and better suited for older readers thus making them more appropriate for middle school students (Blasingame & Goodson, 2001).

Fisher, Flood, Lapp and Frey presented findings from a qualitative study conducted in 2004. The participants in this study were teachers identified by administrators as being "experts" in conducting read-alouds. Interview and observational data enabled the researchers to identify seven components of effective read-alouds. Fisher, Flood, Lapp and Frey (2004) identified these as:

- (1) Books chosen were appropriate to students' interests and matched their developmental, emotional and social levels. (2) Selections had been previewed and

practiced by the teacher. (3) A clear purpose for the read-aloud was established.

(4) Teachers modeled fluent oral reading when they read the text. (5) Teachers were animated and used expression. (6) Teachers stopped periodically and thoughtfully questioned the students to focus them on specifics of the text. (7) Connections were made to independent reading and writing. (p. 10)

The researchers observed 120 teachers not identified as “experts” to determine how often these criteria would be observed. Findings indicated that selecting books that matched the students’ interests and educational levels and the teachers’ use of animation and expression during the read-alouds were consistently observed in all classrooms. Discussion of their findings suggests that even though the teachers may not have received formal instruction, “classroom teachers are skilled at presenting many of the components of an effective read aloud” (p. 15).

Worthy, Chamberlain, Peterson, Sharp, and Shih (2012) studied the use of discussion during read-alouds. This year-long ethnographic study included observations of an exemplary second grade teacher’s use of read-alouds. Findings indicated that this teacher “provided an environment in which the sharing of ideas and emotions was encouraged and fostered through open-ended dialogue” (Worthy et al., 2012). These researchers concluded that the use of dialogue during read-alouds added to the effectiveness of the read-aloud.

Justice, McGinty, Piasta, Kaderavek, and Fan (2010) conducted a study focused on the effectiveness of teachers referencing print during read-alouds with students in prekindergarten. This study included an experimental and comparison group. The experimental group of teachers conducted read-alouds while drawing the students’ attention to print quite often. The comparison group of teachers also conducted read-alouds, but they did not utilize print-referencing during these instructional events. This longitudinal study followed the student participants over a three-

year period. Students' print knowledge was assessed throughout this time, and assessment results indicated that students under the experimental teachers' instruction made greater literacy gains than those who were not. Findings from this study indicate that the use of print-referencing during classroom read-alouds can produce literacy gains in students and improve the overall effectiveness of read-alouds. The researchers concluded that "teachers can make subtle adjustments to the way they share books with children to bolster the knowledge children possess about print" (Justice et al., 2010).

Benefits of read-alouds. Read-alouds are referred to as one of the most effective practices to enhance children's literacy acquisition (Johnson, 2002). While a main section of the No Child Left Behind Act focuses on literacy instruction, many researchers have delved into studying what practices most effect literacy education. Read-alouds have come to surface as being a forerunner of positive literacy activities. One main reason is that the use of read-alouds can increase student interest and motivation to read (Krashen & Brassell, 2003; Meehan, 2006). Johnson (2002) agrees that read-alouds have proven useful in boosting students' motivation to engage in literacy activities. Studies have also shown that read-alouds can increase reading comprehension and students' vocabulary acquisition (Beck & McKeown, 2001; Blessing, 2005; Santoro, Chard, Howard, and Baker, 2008; Zientarski & Pottorff, 1994). Research surrounding the use of read-alouds with older children, middle and high school children, indicates that the use of read alouds results in higher success with the acquisition of content vocabulary and language development (Braun, 2009; Johnson, 2002; Zientarski & Pottorff, 1994). Overall, the research indicates that there are many academic benefits associated with the use of read-alouds.

Read-alouds have also contributed to the development of children's thinking skills in addition to their literacy skills. Albright (2002) reported from studies in a content classroom that

the use of read-alouds resulted in the stimulation of higher order thinking in students. The book selection still plays a major role as shown by the work of Follos (2006). He noted that good literature in itself can cause people to think and question at higher levels. Therefore, teachers must pay close attention to the books selected to use for read-alouds. In addition, teachers should focus on asking higher order thinking questions during these times.

It is important for students to seek reading as an independent activity outside of the school setting. Read-alouds can support this action. Blessing (2005) reports that read-alouds are fun for readers of all ages. It has been stated that the use of read-alouds can lead to students' independent reading desires (Albright, 2002; Meehan, 2006). Horn (2000) even suggests that by exposing students to read-alouds, students learn how to conduct their own read-alouds. The use of read-alouds in the classroom may support students' independent motivation to read. The exposure of different types of literature can offer a variety of types of stories for students to select to read on their own time.

Read-alouds can also contribute to students' vocabulary development. Kindle (2010) conducted a study that focused on the ways teachers utilized read-alouds to develop vocabulary skills of their students. Four elementary teachers and their students participated in this study. Kindle observed these teachers deliver classroom read-alouds and focused on the teachers' pedagogical strategies used to develop vocabulary. Students' vocabulary gains were not measured in this study. Rather, the focus of the study was on the practices used by the teachers. The teachers in this study disclosed that they "were not familiar with any structured methods of sequencing instruction for vocabulary development" (p. 84). Findings from this study indicated that while the teacher participants were not familiar with instructional vocabulary sequences, known methods such as dialogic reading and anchored instruction were observed in all four

participants. Kindle (2010) concluded that “classroom teachers are able to approximate the procedures of formal programs by drawing on their own repertoire of instructional strategies and knowledge of pedagogy” (p. 85). The use of read-alouds can prove to be a useful tool in exposing students to new vocabulary.

Another study that focused on vocabulary development through the use of read-alouds with middle school students indicated that students made significant gains in vocabulary acquisition (Braun, 2009). This mixed-methods study took place over a three-week period in six eighth grade classrooms. Approximately 154 students were given a pre and post vocabulary test and interviewed by the researchers. Results indicated that students labeled as high-leveled learners did make gains in their vocabulary acquisition. Braun (2009) indicated that she did not interact with the students during the read-alouds which limited the effectiveness of the sessions. She suggested that “if students could ask questions, visualize, illustrate, label and discuss the content of the read-alouds, then the method would be more appealing to teachers and more beneficial for students” (p. 115). Although the results did not indicate overwhelming gains, many students did increase their vocabulary knowledge as a direct result of being read to.

Inter-thinking, engaging with others’ ideas through oral language, is a skill that can help students be successful in the classroom. Pantaleo conducted a qualitative study in 2007 that included observational data of students’ use of inter-thinking during classroom read-alouds over a nine-week period. Findings indicated “social and discursive practices established during the small group read-aloud sessions contributed to the students’ language and literacy development” (p. 445). Through the use of inter-thinking, Pantaleo (2007) found evidence that students were capable of constructing meaning from higher leveled books. This is yet another benefit of utilizing read-alouds with students.

A dissertation on read-alouds conducted at Ohio State University by Rietschlin (2012) focused on read-alouds conducted in a second grade classroom. This case study took place over a three-month period and concentrated on students' response to global literature used during read-alouds. The researcher collected field notes, audiotaped read-alouds, and observed students interact with each other during the read-alouds and other times in the school day. She conducted a focus group of five students to discuss the read-aloud stories. Rietschlin discovered several benefits of using global literature during read-alouds. First, Rietschlin (2012) noted that students "developed empathy toward other people around the world" (p. 161). This is an important development in children as it is noted that this development is needed in "promoting global harmony and peace" (p. 161). It was also noted that when the content in the literature used was not connected to the students' schema, "the lack of familiarity seemed to fuel their desire to understand" (p. 158). The students' responses to these read-alouds utilizing global literature could be viewed as more benefits to this pedagogical practice.

Marchessault and Larwin (2014) investigated the use of read-alouds with sixth grade students. The researchers focused on two middle schools. The treatment group received structured read-alouds while the control group did not. The Diagnostic Online Reading Assessment (DORA) was utilized to assess the students' gains in reading comprehension and vocabulary at the culmination of the study. Results indicated that while all participants within the treatment group made gains, the male participants made the greatest literacy gains: "The current investigation demonstrates the potential impact of read-aloud techniques with students in middle school" (p. 194).

Several research studies have been conducted to determine the academic gains of students through the use of read-alouds. Most of the studies have focused on the use of read-alouds in the

elementary school; however, some studies have focused on the middle and secondary leveled grades. Results from such research have indicated that there are many academic benefits to utilizing read-alouds across grade levels.

Motivation to read. Read-alouds have proven to be a useful pedagogical practice for many years. One study conducted by Wood and Salvetta (2001) demonstrates how read-alouds were used to motivate students classified as English Language Learners to surpass their language barriers and participate in meaningful dialogue surrounding the books read aloud. Another study surveyed sixth grade students on different literacy activities used in the classroom. Students indicated that read-alouds were one of the two most preferred literacy activities they experienced in school (Albright & Ariail, 2005). Trelease (1995) states that read-alouds should be conducted in all classrooms because they can stimulate imagination and expand students' attention spans.

A dissertation conducted at the University of Maryland in 2007 focused on the effects of parent-led read-alouds on first-graders' motivation to read. Motivation was cited as an important aspect of reading in this study (Gibson, 2007). Gibson also focused on the students' vocabulary acquisition. From the pool of participants, one group of parents was used as the control group, and one group was used as the intervention group. The intervention group received training on how to conduct interactive read-alouds with their children. Survey data from this study indicated parents agreed that their children "enjoyed the read-alouds and have seen their children become more interested in reading in general" (Gibson, 2007, p. 209). Although the researcher cited as a limitation that no direct observations were conducted of these read-alouds, "the findings of this pilot study provide tentative support for the practice of using interactive read-alouds with children as a way to foster vocabulary and motivation to read" (p. 211).

Meehan (2006) conducted a study with seventh graders over a six-week period. She wanted to know if reading aloud nonfiction books could generate excitement for reading and learning in her students. Utilizing an informal survey, Meehan discovered that her students enjoyed the nonfiction selections because they focused on real-life situations. Results also indicated that her students continued to seek nonfiction selections to read and have enjoyed these readings since the conclusion of the study. Meehan's study provides more evidence on how read-alouds can motivate students to read.

Albright and Ariail's (2005) study suggested "motivation, interest, and engagement are often enhanced when teachers read aloud to middle school students" (p. 582). Their study suggested several guidelines to finding the most motivational books to read aloud. These included: (1) Find texts that are appropriate and engaging. (2) Read the material before reading to students. (3) Stop at various points and share what you are thinking. (4) Encourage students to share what they are thinking. It is the researchers' beliefs that the reading aloud to students can create an "increased motivation to learn" (p. 588). Following these guidelines could prove to be useful to teachers in their attempts to motivate their students to read.

Read-Alouds as a pleasurable experience. It is important to balance aesthetic and efferent purposes for reading in classrooms. In one study, teachers unanimously reported that during read alouds, "students with companion texts appeared to better enjoy, better attend to, and better comprehend the read-alouds" (Tracey, Rhee, & Asbrantes, 2011). This study investigated the effects of teacher read-alouds over a four-month period. A qualitative portion of this study collected observational data on sixteen students. Interviews were also conducted with these same students. All students reported "enjoying the read-aloud project" (Tracey, Rhee, & Asbrantes, 2011).

Another study conducted by Freeman in 2011 focused on how the use of read-alouds affected students' independent book choices. Qualitative measures were used to conduct this study. Teacher observations and student surveys were conducted over a six-month period. One teacher involved in this study stated that "she included read-alouds in her daily instruction mainly as an enjoyable literacy experience for her students" (p. 36). Freeman (2011) also noted during observations of the teacher participants that "having the teacher read with enthusiasm, intonation and character voices made the read-alouds engaging and enjoyable for students" (p. 73). Another teacher in the study expressed that she utilized read-alouds because "she is providing a role model for students to see that reading can be fun and interesting" (p. 42). The results from the student surveys also supported the notion that read-alouds can be viewed as an enjoyable event. When asked if they liked when their teachers read aloud to them, 89% of the students responded that they strongly agreed. In addition, students responded similarly that read-alouds were most enjoyable when their teachers used different voices for characters and read using expression. Implications of Freeman's (2011) study suggest that "teachers need to make a conscious effort to include read-alouds on a regular basis in their daily instruction" (p. 75). Utilizing animation, expression, and different voices during read-alouds can enhance the students' experiences with them.

Barnyak (2011) conducted a qualitative study to specifically focus on the attitudes, beliefs, and interactions of young children and their parents regarding read-alouds. Multiple case studies were conducted on six rural families as they read together. The researcher utilized narrative analysis to best provide a clear understanding of the parents' and children's attitudes and beliefs. Observations and interviews were the primary sources of data. From this data, Barnyak (2011) concluded that "positive literacy experiences, like read-alouds, between parents

and children can enhance children's desire to become avid readers" (p. 153). The children stated "that they enjoyed the time spent reading with their parents" (p. 157). This study provides further evidence that read-alouds can be considered a pleasurable experience for students.

Underutilization of read-alouds. While read-alouds have been proven to be a useful literacy practice, very little is known about their benefits beyond the elementary classroom (Albright & Ariail, 2005). Many middle school teachers say that they feel the practice is inappropriate for use with their students (Albright, 2002). Many middle school teachers also feel that this practice does not have a place in their classrooms due to the content that they teach (Albright & Ariail, 2005). Furthermore, some teachers do not utilize read-alouds because they feel they cannot fit them in to their daily schedules due to the time constraints placed on them and the amount of content that needs to be taught over the course of the school year (Sanacore, 1992). There has been little research done on read-alouds with students who have proceeded past their elementary years of schooling. The research that has been conducted focuses mainly on the lack of research and knowledge in this area. There has also been little attention given to the aesthetic benefits of read-alouds with older students (Albright & Ariail, 2005).

Hodges (2011) engaged in a historical study that uncovered some of the beliefs that hinder teachers' use of read-alouds beyond elementary settings. She indicated that "although reading aloud with children is widely agreed to be beneficial, it is often assumed both by teachers and young people themselves that it is something you grow out of as you become an increasingly proficient reader" (p. 19). She also noted that the emphasis of reading aloud has been on the primary setting and not the secondary school classrooms. However, Hodges interviewed secondary students who are habitual and committed readers, and almost all of the students recalled some pleasurable experience with read-alouds during their lifetimes. Hodges

asserted that in regards to read-alouds: “It may be worth taking up the challenge of making it a more prominent feature in secondary English classrooms” (p. 25).

Using read-alouds with older students. Conducting a read aloud takes as little as five to ten minutes of instructional time. There are many benefits to using this pedagogical practice with children of all ages. When conducting read-alouds with middle and high school students, teachers should select texts that are of interest to students or provide information about a given topic being taught in the content areas. Teachers should read with expression in order to promote the aesthetic values of reading. Goldfinch (2002) informs educators that reading aloud can possibly motivate adolescents to read books that they may not have independently selected to read. A study by Horn (2000) suggests that allowing adolescents to self-select text and conduct the read-aloud in the classroom can be a successful approach to incorporating read-alouds in the middle school classroom. To overcome the burden of time restraints in upper-leveled classrooms, Sanacore (1992) recommends selecting short excerpts from books or using poetry as a source for read-alouds. This will allow teachers to conduct read-alouds in the classroom without consuming too much instructional time. Finally, Sanacore (1992) makes an important point by stating that read-alouds can expose students to the aesthetic side of reading which may stimulate a positive attitude toward reading in general.

Verdin and Hickman (2009) conducted a study that suggested the use of read-alouds with middle school students can help foster self-awareness and the students’ abilities to empathize with others in addition to its academic benefits. This action research study lasted for sixteen weeks and involved six middle school students with emotional or behavioral disorders. Students were read culturally relevant literature for forty minutes a day during the duration of this study. The researchers conducted student interviews and field observations. They also administered an

interest survey to the students. Results from this study indicated that students reported finding positive role models within the stories read aloud that changed how they interacted with others. Verdin and Hickman indicated that by the students finding role models within the stories, they began “choosing prosocial actions similar to those of the characters as they experiences similar situations” (p. 10). Results also indicated that the read-alouds “seemed to foster self-awareness of pivotal personal life events and circumstances that affected subsequent student behavior” (p. 11). Results from this study indicated that in addition to academic benefits, there may be social benefits to the use of read-alouds with middle school students.

Albright and Ariail’s study conducted in 2005 surveyed middle school teachers on their use of read-alouds. Data analysis consisted of calculating percentages of the teachers’ responses. Over 85% of the teachers surveyed reported reading aloud to their students, and of these teachers, a majority of them were English teachers (Albright & Ariail, 2005). The most common reasons teachers cited for reading aloud to their students was “to model aspects of fluent reading, such as pronunciation, intonation, rhythm and style” (p. 584). Some participants even suggested that they used read-alouds to help manage their students’ behaviors. Albright and Ariail (2005) suggested that “an increased emphasis be placed on helping teachers become aware of the multiple benefits and purposes of read-alouds” (p. 587). There may be more educational value to using read-alouds with older students than teachers realize.

Conclusion

In three of the studies conducted on the use of read-alouds with older students, the researchers were practitioners who conducted read-alouds within their own classrooms for the purposes of their study (Albright, 2002; Meehan, 2006; Verden, 2006); therefore, selection of teachers who conduct read-alouds was not paramount to their research. Braun’s (2009) and

Albright and Ariail's (2005) studies included the reading of textbooks rather than literature in their examination of read-alouds with middle school students while Marchessault and Larwin (2014) studied two groups of middle school students—one that received what they referred to as “Structured Read-Alouds” (p.192) as a treatment, and one that received traditional middle school reading instruction without read-alouds—illustrating the intentional delivery of read-alouds for the purposes of their research. Clark and Andreasen (2014) surveyed 87 middle school students on their reading attitudes; however, only one teacher within the school was observed conducting read-alouds. These studies demonstrate the lack of existing research on the use of read-alouds in authentic contexts.

Read-alouds have been utilized as an instructional practice in elementary classrooms for years. Once students progress to middle school, this instructional approach is far less common. With increasing knowledge of the benefits of using read-alouds with all students, more teachers are now attempting to incorporate the use of this practice with their students. Research on the use of read-alouds with middle school students is somewhat limited. The next chapter provides an overview of the methodology utilized to conduct research on the use of read-alouds based on descriptions provided from both the teachers and the students.

Chapter III

Methodology

Introduction

Little research has been conducted on the use of read-alouds at the middle school level, and the research that has been conducted concludes that more research is needed in this area (Albright & Ariail, 2005; Durham, 2014; Layne, 2015). This chapter describes the methodological design that was utilized in this research study, the purpose of which was to describe the use of read-alouds at the middle school level. Findings from this study add to the literature base surrounding the use of read-alouds with older students in grades beyond the elementary years.

Researcher's Position

As a researcher, I identify with a pragmatic, constructivist's framework. Knowledge is constructed based on a person's interaction with the world in which he or she lives and on what is proven to be useful to the individual (Creswell, 2013). I am a practitioner in the field who prepares future teachers therefore best practices of teaching is extremely important to me. Shkdei (2005) asserted, "Constructivist-qualitative research places emphasis on understanding through looking closely at people's words, actions, and records" (p. 7). I concur with Shkdei (2005) that by studying students and teachers as they interact in classrooms, I am best able to determine which pedagogies are most valuable to students.

Creswell (2013) explained, "Pragmatic researchers look to the "what" and "how" of research based on its intended consequences" (p. 28). I am driven by the constant search for knowledge of what works in the area of teacher instruction with students in K-12 schools. According to Creswell (2013), "Pragmatists agree that research always occurs in social,

historical, political, and other contexts” (p. 28). The importance of the context in which the read-alouds were delivered implied a constructivist framework, and therefore a qualitative approach to research afforded me the opportunity to study participants within their natural settings or contexts.

Furthermore, Creswell (2013) explained that constructivists’ research is grounded in the “participants’ views of the situation” (p. 25). The situation of a study can also be termed as the context of the study. I believe research should attempt to explain or interpret the meanings the participants in a study have of the world (Creswell, 2012); therefore, this study was viewed through the lens of a pragmatic, constructivist researcher.

Methods

I followed a phenomenological case study approach to conduct this research. According to Creswell (2013), “a case study is used to develop an understanding of an issue presented in a real-life context, case” (p. 97). A phenomenological case study provided a method to gain a general understanding of the phenomenon of read-alouds as experienced by the participants within this particular case (Yin, 2009). Creswell (2013) described phenomenological studies as those that “describe the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon” (p. 76). Participants were provided opportunities to share descriptions of their experiences with read-alouds in the middle school.

In case study design for research, it is important to clearly define the case (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009). Through the collection of multiple sources of data, a phenomenological case study approach was used to describe the use of a typical, elementary pedagogical practice being used in an atypical setting of a middle school. A phenomenological case study approach

provided a method to gain insight into the teachers' and students' descriptions of the use of read-alouds.

Research Questions

The following main research question was under study:

How do teachers and their students describe the use of read-alouds in middle school classrooms located in South Louisiana?

Two sub-questions were under study:

Why do middle school teachers use read-alouds in their classrooms?

How do middle school students describe their experiences with teacher read-alouds?

Selection of School Sites and Teachers

The study centered on the use of read-alouds in middle school classrooms; therefore, I intended to secure middle school teachers within one of the surrounding school districts from the university in which I teach. The majority of middle schools in the southeastern school districts within a 100-mile radius of the university follow a sixth through eighth grade configuration; there are a few schools that have other grade configurations. A sixth and eighth grade classroom was secured, and prior to conducting this study, permission from the district's superintendent to work in middle schools under his/her direction was obtained.

Participant Selection

Following a mixed, purposeful selection method, I identified eight participants for this study. The convenient selection was "based on time, money, location, and availability of sites or respondents" (Merriam, 2009, p. 79). The participants in this study were all within a 100-mile radius of the university. The phenomenon under study was read-alouds conducted in middle school classrooms; therefore, criterion selection provided quality assurance that the participants

chosen for this study matched the criteria set forth for the bounded case (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). Both teachers chosen were middle school teachers who conduct frequent read-alouds in their classrooms.

Social media, specifically Facebook, was used as an initial probe to recruit the teacher participants. The Facebook probe asked, “Who teaches middle school and reads aloud to your students?” Tan (2010) stated, “Recruitment via Facebook has its advantages in terms of fast response speed and a wide reach” (p. 5). Twenty-seven teachers responded to the initial probe. Possible participants were narrowed down based on the grade levels they taught and the school in which they were employed. Six teachers taught in fourth or fifth grade classrooms, and 13 read textbooks or tests aloud rather than literature, and were thus eliminated. Private messages were then sent to five teachers who met the criteria of frequently reading literature aloud to students. In these messages, the teachers were asked to further describe the materials they read aloud and the frequency in which read-alouds were conducted in their classrooms. Two teachers who taught within 100-mile radius of the researcher and conducted read-alouds at least three times a week were secured; three additional respondents were eliminated due to the locality of their school districts. After describing the study to the participants, confirming confidentiality, and requesting their participation, the teachers signed a letter of consent (see Appendix A for the Letter of Consent).

Once the teacher participants were selected, they were asked to identify three students from their classrooms to participate in this study. A low, average, and high performing student was requested from each class; it was also requested that at least one male and one female student be selected. Ms. Scott was able to provide the requested student participants; however, Mr. Pete only provided male participants as no female students expressed interest in

participating. I gained parental consent (see Appendix B for the Parental Letter of Consent for Minors) by meeting the parents of each student on campus either before or after school, and then met with each student to gain child assent (see Appendix C Written Child Assent Form) for participation in this study. A script explaining the nature of the research was followed when obtaining the child assent (see Appendix D for the verbal script). The overall total of eight participants, two teachers and six students, followed Creswell's (2013) recommendation of securing "5 to 25 individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon" (p. 81) for phenomenological research.

Gatekeepers

Creswell (2013) stated, "Qualitative research involves the study of a research site(s) and gaining permission to study the site in a way that will enable the easy collection of data" (p. 151). Permission was first gained from The University of New Orleans' Institutional Review Board to conduct this study. Once this was obtained, written permission from both the school district's superintendent and the school sites' principals was secured. I was transparent in describing the research questions under study and the methods of data collection required to all gatekeepers.

Data Collection

Merriam (2009) suggested data collection should assist the researcher in "uncovering meaning, developing understanding and discovering insights relevant to the research problem" (p. 86). I collected data that could be analyzed to depict "the essence or basic structure of the experience" of read-alouds (Merriam, 2009, p. 25) Data were in the form of interviews, observations, and field notes taken during the interviews and observations, and they helped answer the research questions in this study.

Interviews. Conducting interviews during a qualitative study can be an important source of data. Merriam (2009) asserted that “interviewing is probably the most common form of data collection in qualitative studies” (p. 86) and interviews serve as a primary method of data collection in phenomenological studies. The type of interviews executed in this study were person-to-person, semi-structured interviews (Merriam, 2009; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Each participant was interviewed twice, and an interview protocol was utilized for the initial interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The second interviews included follow-up questions based on the preliminary analysis of responses given in the first interviews. Separate protocols were used for the teachers and students (see Appendices E and F for the interview protocols); however, both protocols contained questions related to teaching and learning through the use of read-alouds. Additionally, the protocol was also used to record field notes, behavioral types of information that contributed to understanding the participants’ responses. This included body language, gestures and/or facial expressions (Creswell, 2013; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). While the teachers’ interviews were approximately an hour and thirty minutes, the students’ interviews concluded in approximately forty-five minutes to an hour. The teachers shared additional experiences with their read-alouds via email following the scheduled interviews and during the data analysis process. All interviews were audio recorded and field notes were taken during the interviews. This data were stored in a locked file cabinet and will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study. The student interviews were conducted on the schools’ campus during non-instructional times while the teachers’ interviews were conducted on a nearby university campus in the evenings, and all interviews were conducted privately. The university campus was a convenient location for the teachers and ensured greater confidentiality.

Observations. Prior to the observations for data collection, I visited the classrooms several times to develop a rapport with the students. During these visits, I acted as an objective observer, not interacting or participating in any way; however, some field notes were recorded during these times. Merriam (2009) suggested “that the researcher establish rapport by fitting into the participants’ routines, finding some common ground with them, helping out on occasion, being friendly, and showing interest in the activity” (p. 123). Rapport was established with the participants so the data collection during observations was unobtrusive to the natural flow of events during read-aloud times. This proved to be successful as the students greeted me by name upon arrival, and they seemed to pay less attention to my presence with each visit. Two formal observations of the teachers delivering read-alouds in their classrooms were conducted with each lasting approximately forty-five minutes to an hour. The focus of the observations was on each teacher’s delivery of the read-alouds, the students’ behaviors during this time, and the interactions that took place between the teacher and students. The observations were audio recorded and field notes of behavioral actions were taken during observations. This data was also stored in a locked file cabinet and will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

Data Analysis

Verbatim transcripts of all interviews and observations were produced shortly after they took place. Concurring with Merriam (2009), I held the belief that a verbatim transcript with field notes provided the most accurate data to be analyzed (Merriam, 2009). The audio tapes of the interviews and observations were utilized during the transcriptions, and suggestions by Merriam (2009) to better organize the transcript of the interviews were followed. This included double spacing between speakers, including line numbering down the left-hand side of the transcript, and labeling each response as either the interviewer or the subject (Merriam, 2009).

Each transcript was finalized with a summary of the interview, inclusive of the main points made by each participant and the participant's demographical information. The same process was followed for the observation transcripts, and the entire transcription process served as a preliminary analysis of the data.

Coding. To prepare the data for analysis, transcripts were divided into meaningful units and research questions were reviewed (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) purported, "the practical goal of data analysis is to find answers to your research questions" (p. 176). I read the transcripts several times and utilized open coding to continue the analysis process. Open coding is defined as the process of jotting down notations next to bits of data that are deemed important to a study (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). I gave attention to reoccurring ideas throughout the transcripts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009; Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). Transcripts from the teachers and students were then combined in one document to allow for a horizontal analysis of the data. Through the use of axial coding, open codes were combined into common categories (Merriam, 2009). This process of analysis was repeated to help find more and better relevant data until the categories were inclusive to all of the meaningful units (Merriam, 2009). The final stage in the coding process was selective coding which involved merging common categories to develop themes; the themes were then matched to the research question they best answered.

Ethical Issues

In conducting any research, the protection of the participants should be a primary concern of the researcher (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam 1988, 2009). Necessary steps were taken to lessen the risks of participating in this study for the participants. The transcriptions of the teachers' interviews and observations were stored in a locked file cabinet. Pseudonyms were used throughout the study when referring to the teachers in order to maintain anonymity.

All conversations that took place with the teachers were kept confidential, and I conducted the interviews on a university campus rather than at the school sites.

The students in the study were informed that at any time in the study, they could withdraw from participating without penalty; no student chose to do so. Students were permitted to select a pseudonym that was used when reporting findings from this study, ensuring anonymity of the students. They were reminded during the interviews that all conversations would be kept confidential, and the students were made aware that the information they shared during interviews would not be disclosed to their teachers nor would their participation affect their grades in any way. To further secure confidentiality, each student interview took place in an unoccupied space on the school's campus without the teacher present. The pseudonyms selected by each student participant were kept confidential from the teachers ensuring the students' responses during interviews would not be disclosed to their teacher. All transcripts of the students' interviews and interactions during the observations were stored in a locked file cabinet throughout the duration of the study.

Trustworthiness

Establishing the trustworthiness of a qualitative study involves credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Measures were taken to achieve trustworthiness in all domains. The next section will explain each of the measures taken.

Credibility

Credibility of a study focuses on the believability of the results. To achieve credibility, prolonged engagement was established with the participants throughout the study. The main objective of prolonged engagement was to build trust amongst the participants and the researcher

(Lincoln & Guba, 2009). I visited the classrooms several times prior to the start of data collection. Mr. Pete's students were visited four times prior to any data collection. I arrived for each student interview ten to fifteen minutes in advance to allow for more time spent in the classroom. Each of the three participants were interviewed twice and a third meeting was scheduled to member check the data from the final interview. In total, I was present in Mr. Pete's classroom nine additional times. Ms. Scott's classroom was visited three times prior to data collection, and similar to the visits with Mr. Pete, nine additional visits occurred. Unexpectedly, one unplanned visit to Ms. Scott's classroom occurred when a student was absent from school on the day of a scheduled interview. Rather than leaving the school, I spent additional time in the classroom. The delivery of read-alouds by each teacher participant was observed twice and two interviews were conducted with each participant. Records of each visit and interview were kept as part of the audit trail.

Triangulation of data allows the researcher to confirm one source of information to another (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009; Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). Data from the interviews, observations, and field notes were triangulated to improve the credibility of the findings. To best ensure coherence between the findings of this study and the participants' lived experiences with read-alouds, I triangulated the data collected from the multiple interviews, follow-ups questions, observational data, and field notes.

In addition to prolonged engagement and triangulation of data, I relied on a colleague who is also a reading specialist for peer debriefing. One of the main roles of the peer debriefer is to play the devil's advocate of the study by questioning the researcher's steps and interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Participating in peer debriefing kept me aware of any biases developing during the study or unclear interpretations of data that existed. For example, after open coding of

the data had been completed, the debriefer reviewed the number of codes identified from the data, and this discussion resulted in three conclusions regarding the low number of identified codes. (1) The students were not as vocal as the teachers during interviews, especially the female student who displayed obvious signs of shyness. (2) The questions asked during the interviews focused only on read-alouds therefore their responses were limited to their experiences with this specific pedagogy. (3) Many of the experiences shared by the participants were similar resulting in repetitious codes rather than new ones. The peer debriefer was also instrumental in ensuring the proper wording of the themes that emerged from the data analysis. Through constant questioning and discussion, the peer debriefer assisted in taking the necessary steps to establish credibility of the study. Written records of each peer debriefing session were kept in a journal as part of the audit trail.

Finally, the participants member checked the interpretations of their experiences from the interview transcripts. Merriam (2009) explained, “The process involved in member checks is to take your preliminary analysis back to some of the participants and ask whether your interpretation rings true” (p. 217). The participants were able to verify my interpretations of their words as accurate accounts of their experiences with read-alouds. With the students, member checking took place through conversations; interpretations of their experiences were shared, and the students confirmed them. Member checking of the teacher data was achieved via email. Through the use of member checking, triangulation of data, peer debriefing, and prolonged observation, credibility was added to the findings of this study.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the notion that findings from one study can be generalized to a similar population (Lincoln & Guba, 2009; Merriam, 2009). In qualitative research, thick

descriptions allow someone interested in the research to decide if the conclusions are transferable to other populations (Lincoln & Guba, 2009). I provided an accurate account of how the participants experienced read-alouds. Descriptions of each participant were provided and their voices were used to describe the read-aloud experience.

Dependability

Dependability refers to whether or not the researcher's "findings, interpretations, and conclusions are supported by the data" (Creswell, 2013, p. 252). To ensure dependability, an auditor checked the data collected in this study. A colleague who holds a terminal degree in English education and was not connected to the study authenticated the data collected and verified the processes followed to conduct this research. The auditor had also conducted a phenomenological research study for her dissertation, enabling her to provide guidance throughout the duration of the study. By examining both the process of inquiry and the product, the auditor verified the study's dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 2009). Records of meetings with the auditor were kept in a journal as part of the audit trail.

Confirmability

Confirmability establishes verification of the researcher's findings in a study (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). I kept an audit trail of all data collected throughout the study to establish confirmability, and all transcripts of interviews and observations were housed in a locked file cabinet throughout the study. A methodological journal was maintained detailing all of the processes followed to complete the study. The peer debriefer and the external auditor were granted access to all documents and played an active role in confirming the results of this study. Having the auditor corroborate the research process and results added confirmability to the study.

Conclusion

Through this phenomenological case study, middle school teachers' and students' descriptions on the use of read-alouds in the classroom were captured. This chapter explained my positionality, the methods of inquiry utilized, and details regarding the design and delivery of the study. The next chapter details the results of the study based on the data collected and analyzed.

Chapter IV

Results

The focus of a phenomenological case study according to Patton (1990) is on the descriptions of peoples' experiences. The goal of this research was to describe the experiences that middle school teachers and students had with read-alouds. These descriptions provide the essence of their experiences. In this chapter, I first provide an explanation of how the data were analyzed, and then give descriptions of the middle school teachers and students who participated in this study. Following these descriptions, the major themes that emerged from the horizontalization analysis of the data are discussed.

Teacher Participants

Mr. Pete

Mr. Pete is a sixth grade English Language Arts teacher at South Middle School where he has taught for four years. He is a 33 year-old, Black male who has been teaching for seven years. Mr. Pete stated that he reads aloud to his students just about every day and explained that he uses read-alouds during various times within his lessons. Read-alouds are sometimes used in his task focus to gain students' attention, but he also uses them during the guided practice portion of his lessons. He described how doing this helps engage his students in the stories being read. Mr. Pete emphasized the value he places on read-alouds by stating, "I think it cannot be overstated that read-alouds are important."

Ms. Scott

Ms. Scott is an eighth grade English Language Arts teacher at North Middle School. She is a 36 year-old, White female who has been teaching on and off for approximately seven years and is in her second year as an eighth grade teacher. Ms. Scott said that she reads aloud to her students at least two to three times a week. Her read-alouds often occur at the beginning of

lessons; however, she stated that she also uses them within guided practice at times. Ms. Scott explained that she uses various types of texts to conduct read-alouds within her classroom, which includes anything from “children’s books, to novels, to articles,” or any other text related to what the class is reading at the time.

Book Selection

Both participants discussed the importance of book selection in the descriptions of their read-alouds. Ms. Scott said that she tries to find things that the students can relate to, or in other words, things that may be similar to the experiences they are having. She said she specifically selected *The Outsiders* as one of their novels because it was “something they would be interested in.” She explained that finding books that interest her students is not always easy to do, but “they all love *The Outsiders*.” Mr. Pete said that he would read anything that would grab his students’ attention or anything they mentioned would interest them. He further stated:

The content drives their interests. While they love when I read and show pictures in a children’s book, they also like the more young adult themes expressed [in novels]. It becomes more tangible to them, especially what they aspire to because of their developmental stages (Pete, 2017).

Both Ms. Scott and Mr. Pete were thoughtful in their selection of books used for read-alouds.

Analysis of the Teacher Data

To fully capture the essence of read-alouds from the teachers’ perspectives, I conducted one-to-one interviews and classroom observations. Each teacher participated in two interviews that occurred after the school day. Interviews focused on the teachers’ use of read-alouds, including their reasons for conducting them and their experiences with them in their classrooms. Teachers were asked to elaborate on the descriptions via email during the data analysis phase of

this study. Two formal observations were conducted in each classroom during the times read-alouds were being executed, and several casual visits transpired during data collection as described in Chapter 3. The teachers were not reading aloud to their students during these visits.

Coding

Eight transcriptions were coded using open coding following two separate approaches. First, each transcript was coded twice in isolation, and then after combining all data into one document, coding occurred once more. The transcripts were combined to achieve horizontalization, which is “the process of laying out all the data for examination and treating the data as having equal weight” (Merriam, 2009, p. 26). A total of 47 codes were identified from the analyses of the transcriptions. Some of the most reoccurring codes throughout the data were real-life connections, engagement, vocabulary, modeling, enjoyment, comprehension, and teaching, and lesser occurring codes included observation, insecurities, necessity, and flexibility. Similarities among the various codes materialized as they were analyzed and led to the development of categories.

Categories

Categorization of the meaningful pieces of data that had already been coded was achieved by configuring similar codes together. Once coded data were grouped by similarities, inclusive categories were identified. For example, such codes as fast pace, voice inflection, and fluency were categorized as aspects of fluency. The thirteen categories that resulted from this analysis were combined to create themes, which best described the teachers’ experiences with read-alouds.

Themes that Emerged from the Teacher Data

Six themes emerged from the categories, and these themes depict how the teachers describe their use of read-alouds.

1. The teachers conducted read-alouds to provide their students with an enjoyable experience.
2. Conducting read-alouds facilitated teachers' engagement with their students.
3. The teachers used read-alouds to aid students who struggle with reading and promote students' independent reading abilities and habits.
4. Components of reading were enhanced through the use of read-alouds.
5. Read-alouds afforded teachers the opportunity to expose their students to soft skills and survival skills.
6. Teacher read-alouds were impacted by state testing and district mandates.

The next section will discuss each theme and provide the supporting data to help illustrate the teachers' experiences with read-alouds. In the following data, discourse markers such as *like* or *because* were typed verbatim as the participants used them. However, filled pauses such as *um* have been removed for ease in reading.

Theme 1: Read-Alouds as Enjoyable Experiences

Both teachers asserted their students enjoy read-alouds. In reference to the use of children's books within her classroom, Ms. Scott said, "Oh, they love them. They're just so different from what they're used to being made to read." Mr. Pete said, "Everybody likes to be read to. I like to hear interesting stories, so I figure they would as well." Cognizant of his students' responses to read-alouds, he shared, "These responses range in emotions, included but not limited to joy, shock, sadness, intrigue, etcetera. The gamut of emotions expressed [during

his read-alouds] depends upon the content as well as their prior knowledge and or their experiences.” Students’ emotional reactions to read-alouds were one of the measures Mr. Pete used to monitor how much his students enjoy being read to.

Mr. Pete expressed that it can sometimes be difficult to incorporate read-alouds for student enjoyment due to the district’s demands placed upon him; however, he said that he tries as often as possible. “I try to inject just a pure level of enjoyment, so they never think about reading as sort of a punishment, or in sort of a punitive way” In response to how he thinks his students feel about his read-alouds, he stated, “They definitely enjoy them.” He confirmed that a student once told him, “Mr. Pete, I enjoy when you read to us.” Ms. Scott described how she sometimes has the students sit on her floor during what she calls “story time.” She explained how she shows the students the pictures, and they all look at them and listen to her read. When asked how she thinks her students feel about her read-alouds, Ms. Scott said, “I think they like it. I do.” She went on to describe that her students occasionally ask her to read to them.

During the observations conducted in the classrooms, the students responded positively to the teachers’ read-alouds as no student was observed displaying any outward objections to listening to their teachers read. During one of Mr. Pete’s observations, student interest was noticeable. When Mr. Pete told the students they would read a novel called *Hatchet*, which is written by Gary Paulsen, he asked, “How many of you enjoy doing things outdoors?” Several students said, “Yes,” and most responses were offered by male students. Mr. Pete then asked, “What types of things do you enjoy doing outdoors?” One student talked about hunting with his dad for deer, and he explained, “We go out before the sun comes up. A lot of times I get a lot of mosquito bites too.” Other students had their hands up to respond; however, the teacher only allowed for one student response. Mr. Pete explained how the novel details issues of surviving in

the outdoors, and asked, “So how many of you want to read about survival in *Hatchet*?” Many students responded in unison while others raised their hands, indicating eagerness to begin listening to a new story.

Theme 2: Facilitating Engagement with Students

Throughout the interviews, the teachers described how they use read-alouds to keep their students on task. Mr. Pete shared, “Engagement is a big thing. That’s my main goal,” and then further explained:

Read-alouds help to engage the students through the simple telling of a story. Sometimes, I make them clear off their desks and free their hands before I begin, which ensures no other forms of distractions. Or, if anything is on their desks at all, it is the text that I am reading (Pete, 2017).

He also detailed the use of other materials used for his read-alouds that continued to illustrate the importance of engagement:

I can think of, especially on Fridays when we use Flocabulary, the educational site. I show my students the weekend rap, and I get them to respond to it. I show them the video twice, but in between showing the video, I will read them or rap them the lyrics. So, it serves as a read-aloud to engage them. Then, they have to respond, stating what they found was interesting (Pete, 2017).

Similarly, when discussing her read-alouds, Ms. Scott expressed, “I select supplemental texts or a portion of the mandated, daily curriculum content for read-alouds. Doing so not only helps me to engage the students with the overall goal of the daily lesson, but in reading the passage.” She also shared, “I stop and explain things too when I read, especially if it’s a more complex text. I’ll ask them questions a lot.”

Mr. Pete illustrated his use of various materials when referencing the types of texts he reads aloud:

Whether it be a news article or a fairytale story with a different spin, or if it's something geared toward a historical event that's happening...anything that I think would be content worthy or just something for fun that would, you know, get them engaged (Pete, 2017).

When considering read-alouds as an opportunity to intellectually engage middle school students, Mr. Pete summed up his thoughts:

It's just the power in the presentation [regarding read-alouds], not just reading words off a page. What is written is not only meant to be read but more so spoken or presented. Reading and presentation are two different yet related things. Effective and efficient oratory has a direct impact: the audible quality or nature can transform the reception of the content or ideals expressed to the audience and convey nuances such as sarcasm as well as emotions. It [read-aloud] transcends reading. It becomes a presentation for the students to individually and collectively experience, process, and respond to (Pete, 2017).

The teachers were observed involving students with the stories by either asking questions or making textual connections. Both teachers provided students with individual copies of some of the books being read, and the students were encouraged to follow along as the teachers read.

Mr. Pete articulated the reasons why he has his students follow along in their companion texts:

I make sure that each student has a copy of the novel, so all can follow along and hear the words as I pronounce them. I think it is important for them to make the connection between seeing and hearing what is being read, which will help with their vocabulary acquisition and reading fluency. It also helps as an accountability piece, just in case I ask

them to read with me aloud or add any kind of sound or repeat a phrase after me, so they can use that expression (Pete, 2017).

During one observation, I witnessed Mr. Pete’s continuation of reading *Hatchet*. On this particular day, a severe storm raged outside with flashing lightening and loud thunder actually shaking the classroom windows. In order to compete with the distracting weather, Mr. Pete projected his voice above the booming thunder to keep his students engaged with the story. The crescendo in his voice allowed Mr. Pete to regain students’ attention as the storm endured throughout the entire lesson. Although there were many distractions including screams from the students outside, Mr. Pete was able redirect his students and keep them focused on the story by changing the pitch of his voice.

While both teachers used questioning techniques to engage the students during their read-alouds, Mr. Pete displayed his questions on his Promethean board, reviewing them prior to reading each chapter in the novel. Figure 2 provides an example of one set of questions observed.

| |
|--|
| Chapter 13 |
| 1. Brian felt like he was a new person. Where and how did this take place? |
| 2. Explain refraction. How did the understanding of this phenomenon help Brian catch his first fish? |
| 3. Brian showed ingenuity in this chapter. Cite examples. |
| 4. What, do you think, did Brian mean when he said that he was full of tough hope? |

Figure 2: Mr. Pete's Questions

Mr. Pete engaged students by reading the questions—convergent and divergent in nature—prior to reading aloud and by discussing the questions after reading aloud. During one observation for example, Mr. Pete asked, “How many of you would have felt hopeless like Brian did?” At this point in *Hatchet*, the main character, Brian, who had just experienced several failed attempts to

catch fish, was realizing that his stomach had likely shrunk from being starved, and he had missed making a fire to signal a distant plane flying by. Raising their hands as an indication that they too would have felt hopeless, students then offered explanations to justify their feelings which are detailed within the student data section of this study. Understanding Brian's hopeless feelings demonstrated the students' level of engagement with the text.

Mr. Pete utilized a planned questioning technique; the questions were always displayed and discussed prior to his reading of a chapter and then answered at the end. However, he described the use of other questioning techniques depending on the materials being read. He remarked, "I'll ask yes or no questions as a simple attention check. I'll also ask open-ended questions to spark conversation."

Similarly, Ms. Scott's students followed along in their own texts as she read aloud *The Outsiders*. She explained:

I just want them to like, I want them to be able to see what I'm reading. So, if I stop to talk to them about a particular word, they can see what that word looks like and not just hear me say it (Scott, 2017).

I noted that students followed along, only now and then glancing up to look at Ms. Scott. The majority of students appeared to have their attention on the books and were engrossed during the reading.

Through the use of questioning, Ms. Scott exhibited another method of engagement. While she did not display questions prior to reading, she stopped several times throughout her read-aloud to check for understanding or to clarify word meaning. She too included questions of an open-ended nature. At this point in the novel, Ponyboy had been bruised and cut up from a recent fight and was just awakening from unconsciousness. He had missed several days of school

and was dealing with the emotions of the recent killings of two of his friends. Ponyboy was being pressured by his older brother to return to school, as acquiring an education was of importance. Ms. Scott paused from reading and asked her students if they would have gone to school given the circumstances surrounding Ponyboy. Students who said, “Yes” or raised their hands were asked to explain why; and after given time to express their reasoning, Ms. Scott resumed reading aloud.

Throughout the observations and interviews, both participants not only demonstrated how they used questioning techniques to involve their students, but they also described the importance of engagement in their classrooms. Furthermore, Mr. Pete demonstrated how he used his power of oratory to keep students focused during a thunderstorm.

Theme 3: Read-Alouds as a Method to Bridge the Gap and Promote Independent Readers

Both participants were asked to describe the reasons they use read-alouds in their classrooms. Ms. Scott and Mr. Pete touched on the ideas of bridging the gap for the less able readers and encouraging students to read independently. Ms. Scott explained that the reason she began using read-alouds was because she often felt her students were not fully comprehending what they should have been while reading on their own. As she described getting blank stares from her students, she added, “Eventually they are going to have to read on their own... But, I can’t just throw them out to the wolves either, so you do what you have to do to try to bridge the gaps.” She stated simply, “I mean, if they need it, they still need it.”

Mr. Pete described his use of children’s books as a way to help bridge the gap for lower performing readers:

My incorporation of the children’s stories is because I find a lot of my students just

missed that [in reference to reading]. Just lacked that [reading proficiency] completely due to environmental stimuli. Or two, they just missed that aspect of it from the elementary setting. So, being that I'm a transitional year—sixth grade is the first grade level at my school—I figure that it's a good way to bridge the gap (Pete, 2017).

He further described how some of his students lack the prerequisite skills—voice inflection, vocabulary knowledge, and schema—that would enable them to read more complex texts. For that reason, he asserted, “As I read, I'm able to fill them with so much because they lack so much skill. I'm able to fill in a lot of the holes.” In addition, he said, “I am able to unpack information and guide the students to help them better understand and apply complex concepts and skills.” Mr. Pete also feels that his read-alouds are interesting and can draw his students' attention. “By my reading aloud,” he said, “the students now have a point of reference that they may better understand and with which they can successfully negotiate the daily content through context.” Mr. Pete expressed the importance of using read-alouds to “fill the gap” for the less able readers.

The teachers each described how having their students see them as readers can help promote the students' own independent reading. Mr. Pete explained, “I try to show them that I read, show them the importance of reading, and if your teacher still reads, maybe it might be a good thing for you to read as well.” He also described listening to one of his former librarians read aloud during library time:

We had a phenomenal librarian at the school. She had a carpet, and I would go sit on the carpet with the students. So, I would sit there and I would listen just as attentively, if not more, than the students. And the kids were surprised that I was so engaged, and in turn, it fostered their engagement as well. Because if Mr. Pete can sit here and listen to a book, and can't wait to get to the library to hear a book, then there must be something to this

reading thing (Pete, 2017).

Mrs. Scott expressed, “I would hope it would help them to become better readers.”

Although she could not describe any particular success stories at the time, she did say that her students’ grades had improved throughout the year, and she felt that her read-alouds were a contributing factor. She recalled that prior to reading aloud to her students, many would just sit and not read or comprehend the book. “I think the more I do it [read-aloud], the more the students value it,” she said.

Mr. Pete described encouraging his students to read-aloud to themselves at times. He stated, “I always tell my students, if you can, if you’re in a setting where you can, read aloud to yourself. If you can hear your own voice, it makes a difference.” Both teachers felt read-alouds assisted their students in becoming independent readers.

Theme 4: Read-Alouds as an Activity to Enhance Components of Reading

Read-alouds were described by both teachers as activities used to introduce and teach literacy skills and strategies. Although I did not observe Mr. Pete reading picture books, he described how he uses them to address components of reading:

The basic structure and format simplicity employed in a children’s book allows for easy teaching as well as explaining the use of dialogue. It is the perfect platform from which to build because the students usually already know the story and are not so much fixated on what will happen. Freeing them of such curiosities is a way I can focus them in on how what is said is written. This model is effective and efficient to reach all student (*sic*) and ensure they learn (Pete, 2017).

Similarly, Ms. Scott stated, “Whatever we use in terms of a read-aloud is always a vehicle to get me to whatever I’m teaching.” Other than novels, Ms. Scott also used picture books with her students:

I use them [picture books] a lot to teach or review basic English language arts skills such as point of view, plot or theme. I can model identifying these skills easily from these types of books because they are interesting and easy to understand (Scott, 2017).

Within their descriptions of using read-alouds as a teaching and modeling tool, both teachers mentioned addressing in some way three of the five components of reading. The attention given to some of these components by the teachers was captured during observations of their read-alouds. Table 1 identifies each component that falls under this theme.

| Component 1 | Component 2 | Component 3 |
|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| Vocabulary | Fluency | Comprehension |

Table 1. Theme 4- Components of Reading

Component 1: Vocabulary. The participants described how they addressed unknown vocabulary during their read-alouds, and Mr. Pete gave a specific example of developing meaning of a word during one of his lessons:

I read the word *ubiquitous*, and they were like...that’s not a real word. I was like, yes it is! So, let’s use it on the board. So, we wrote it on the board. I wrote a sentence, and the sentence was Taylor Swift’s name is ubiquitous. They were like—ubiquitous? So, I asked what is Taylor Swift? She’s popular; she’s well-known. Oh okay, so that’s what that word means. She’s popular; she’s well-known. So, we were building their vocabulary, and all of that happened as a result of a read-aloud (Pete, 2107).

Ms. Scott also provided a vivid example of addressing misconceptions of vocabulary during one of her read-alouds. She described how many of her students take the literal meaning of words rather than using the context of the story:

Like this year for example, they just don't have good vocabulary skills at all. This year while we were reading *The Outsiders*, the book described one of the characters as being a *wisecracker*. I noticed a few kids snickering, so I was like what are you laughing at? It took me awhile to get it. They thought the word, *wisecracker*, meant a smart, White person. So, I joked with them about it, but we had a whole discussion on that. That they can't just take things literally (Scott, 2017),

"I stop when there's a word in which I want the students to figure out its meaning," Ms. Scott stated, and then she elaborated, "I try to get them to use the text if there are words in the text that can help them figure out the word." She sometimes prompts them to look for root words to help the students bring meaning to what is read. When focusing on vocabulary, Ms. Scott stressed, "I want them to be able to eventually get to that on their own."

In Ms. Scott's first observation, the class followed along as she read from *The Outsiders*. She stopped, reread a sentence from the book, and asked the class what it meant. The sentence was: *I was taking too much effort to seem effortless*. None of the students responded to her question; they simply looked at her. She then asked, "What does it mean to put in effort to do your schoolwork?" "You put in the work" is what one student answered. She then said, "So, if something is effortless, can we say that it means you can do it without putting in the work?" The students nodded in agreement and she continued to read. Addressing the meaning of *effortless* was done to not only aid the students in understanding one word but to also help them comprehend the meaning of the entire sentence.

During Mr. Pete's second observation, he read the question: *The mood at the end of this chapter was pessimistic and hopeless. Why?* He then asked his students if someone could tell the class what the word *pessimistic* means. One student responded, "Hopeless." Mr. Pete affirms this response and tells the class, "When we talk about context clues, you know what we tell you guys. Sometimes the word is actually defined in the text and sometimes it gives you synonyms." While further explaining vocabulary development, Mr. Pete said "The more they hear someone speaking and reading to them, the better they will speak and perform in terms of developing their own opinions and increasing their vocabulary and sentence structure." He continued, "Their vocabulary just increases tenfold because of read-alouds. Vocabulary acquisition is huge."

Component 2: Fluency. Mr. Pete and Ms. Scott spoke of modeling fluency for their students during read-alouds. Ms. Scott mentioned that her students are not very fluent when reading and often sound choppy. She said, "They're just not fluent at all, so they struggle sometimes. They just give up. So, I would rather them hear someone fluent." Ms. Scott also described a time that she used fairytales as a read-aloud to model fluent reading:

Just a few weeks ago, and so we did fairytales. I would read that, and they loved that. Just to hear all the characters talk and you know, that kind of thing. They don't read like that when they read at all. I think it's important for them to hear what that sounds like, even in eighth grade (Scott, 2017).

Although Ms. Scott spoke of fluency during her interviews, the expressiveness of a fluent reader was not demonstrated during observations. Fluent readers read with an appropriate pace, accuracy of word reading, and proper phrasing and expression. When Ms. Scott read aloud to her students, she did so using a very quick pace with little to no expression. As students have told her she reads fast, she is aware of this. She described using expression for characters' voices in the

previous example of reading fairytales; however, this was not observed as she read chapters from *The Outsiders*.

Demonstrating a lot of expression, changing his voice for characters, and reading at an appropriate pace, Mr. Pete read with fluency during his observations. Using read-alouds to model fluency is one of the reasons Mr. Pete said he reads to his students. While describing the value he places on read-alouds, Mr. Pete specifically stated that one of the reasons they are so beneficial to his students is because he can model fluency:

Sometimes we take for granted the power of speech, like in a read-aloud, the importance of how something is said and read, and the little nuances of our voice. So things like that, and just the way you can convey certain things to students just by the way you say it. So, you can show them how to make inferences based upon if there was a question mark there, or an exclamation point there. Being able to do this just helps them (Pete, 2017).

Mr. Pete also allows his students to volunteer to read occasionally, and this helps identify which of his students are lacking in fluency. He explained:

So, if I have a lot of students raising their hands, and they are eager to read, then I mix it up. Then at some point, I mix and match it, where I call on a student. They read a paragraph. Then, I read a paragraph or two. Then, I'll let others read. And especially if the students are not reading so well, and it allows me to see okay, this person is a fluent reader. This person is not a fluent reader (Pete, 2017).

While both teachers described the importance of having their students hear fluent reading, Mr. Pete demonstrated all aspects of fluency; however, Ms. Scott read quickly with little expression. Although she expressed the importance of modeling fluency for her students, characteristics of fluency were not observed during her read-alouds.

Component 3: Comprehension. The teachers referenced teaching various literary elements such as point of view, plot, theme, foreshadowing and flashback through the use of their read-alouds as an aid in their students' comprehension of the stories. Ms. Scott mentioned that her students frequently tell her "they just get it" when she reads aloud. She explicitly discussed utilizing children's books to address aspects of comprehension:

I use them a lot to teach or review basic English language arts skills such as point of view, plot or theme. I can model identifying these skills easily from these types of books because they are interesting and easy for the students to understand (Scott, 2017).

Dr. Seuss stories were named as some of her favorite picture books to read to her students. She referenced using *Yertle the Turtle*, *Sneetches*, *Green Eggs and Ham*, and *The Lorax* and asserted, "You can gain a lot. You can gain theme real easily from a children's story."

Like Ms. Scott, Mr. Pete described his use of picture books to address plot. He went on to say:

Also, just in terms of the content aspect as well, teaching things like folklore, teaching the difference between fairytales and fantasy. So, I'm able to bring some of those children's books in to teach them things. One thing I use a lot is plot. Plot is something I can teach through an easy story frame like *The Three Little Pigs*. So, that way I can easily delineate focus on each stage of plot, and they can see it through something that they're already familiar with. So, it's not as foreign as a concept (Pete, 2017).

During Mr. Pete's observations, while he did not mention specific literary elements, he did have questions displayed before each chapter he read aloud. Many of the questions required specific comprehension skills or knowledge of literary elements in order for his students to

formulate an answer. Table 2 provides an example of some of the questions Mr. Pete asked and the comprehension skills or literary elements associated with each question.

| Question | Comprehension Skill/ Literary Element |
|---|---|
| How did Brian make his fishing spear? Why didn't it work for him? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Story Details |
| Brian's eating habits had changed. What did he notice about himself? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Character Analysis |
| Brian felt like a new person. Where and how did this take place? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Story Details • Sequence of Events |
| Explain refraction. How did the understanding of this phenomenon help Brian catch his first fish? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making Inferences |

Table 2. Questions and Comprehension Skills/ Literary Elements Alignment

Mr. Pete discussed using his read-alouds to assist students in learning how to answer the read and respond questions on their district's reading tests. He noted, "Little things like understanding character improves their comprehension. And then it allows them to better address those read and respond questions." These read and respond types of questions are answered after students read a short excerpt; read-alouds give Mr. Pete an opportunity to have students practice this skill.

Both participants described a plethora of comprehension skills and/or literary elements addressed during their read-alouds. While neither teacher used the name of any one skill or element during observations, the questions shown in Figure 5 illustrate how Mr. Pete used read-alouds to give his students opportunities to practice a variety of comprehension skills and use their knowledge of literary elements.

Theme 5: Read-Alouds to Expose Students to Life Skills and Survival Skills

The teachers described how they could use their read-alouds to help enhance student schema and make personal connections. Many times, each participant referenced teaching life

skills. In most of these instances, they were actually describing either soft skills, such as courtesy, teamwork, responsibility and empathy, or survival skills.

Ms. Scott explained she likes to read books the students can relate to though they are not always easy to identify. She elaborated on how students relate to the characters in *The Outsiders* by saying, “I talk to them about the deaths of Johnny and Dallas, and I tell them violence never solves anything.” Ms. Scott explained that many of her students come from neighborhoods with a lot of violence; subsequently, there are a large number of fights between students on their campus. She noted, “If I can get them to...to think about the consequences of their actions from reading to them, then that’s always good.”

Bullying is another issue Ms. Scott addressed through reading *The Outsiders*:

Ponyboy gets treated very poorly in the story because he’s a Greaser. He also gets...talked...well, judged by others because of his appearance. They have that long hair that’s slicked back [Ms. Scott ran her fingers through her hair as to show slicked back hair]. But my students really like his character. They don’t think he’s a bad person, so we get to talk about how you can’t just judge somebody...your classmates...you can’t just judge them because they look different from you (Scott, 2017).

Soft skills were described in great detail by Mr. Pete. He stated, “Sometimes the simplicity of stories are (*sic*) good to espouse things like morals and different other values. So, to teach them how to be a total person, not just a student.” Mr. Pete continued to describe how he uses read-alouds to teach the students soft skills:

Getting them to understand certain things as right versus wrong. Getting them to understand the importance of things like honesty, citizenship...some of those things that again, that maybe they didn’t grasp environmentally, or things that they evidence at

school that they're struggling with. Just the importance of sharing, understanding differences with the students, being accepted and welcoming in terms of their culture and background, so just little things like that I find very good examples of in read-alouds (Pete, 2017).

With passion in his voice, he stated, "I am able to really educate them and in some cases, model appropriate emotional responses." He continued to describe the importance of teaching students about empathy, sympathy, and respect for individual differences. The discussion was concluded with Mr. Pete stating:

We fail to engage with people. We fail to read enough or hear enough read to us to understand what is truly there. So, once you start to read more and have more read to you, and you understand those things and you understand people for who they are, then I think it makes the world a better place. [pause] Read-alouds allow me to do just that (Pete, 2017).

During Mr. Pete's second observation, he conducted a read-aloud of two chapters from the book, *Hatchet*. He reminded the students they have been learning about survival methods. During this read-aloud, Mr. Pete asked his students, "What did Brian mean when he said that maybe it was always that way, discoveries happen because they needed to happen?" Students shouted out answers, so Mr. Pete redirected their attention by saying, "One," and the students all responded by saying, "Two." Then, Mr. Pete called on one student who responded that Brian's discoveries allowed him to see his mistakes that helped him to survive. Another student made a personal connection about being fearful while getting lost in a cane field playing with friends. Mr. Pete responded, "We talked about survival in light of Brian's situation and the things you would do if you get lost in the woods or if you have to survive by yourself for a few days." A

class discussion ensued regarding the different lessons they had learned in relation to survival such as finding fresh water, food and shelter.

Theme 6: Teacher Read-Alouds were Impacted by State Testing and District Mandates

The topics of testing and district mandates came forth throughout the interviews as the teachers described their use of read-alouds. Mr. Pete felt that state testing alters how he conducts read-alouds as well as the frequency with which he does them. He first expressed his concern with the shift in curriculum towards college and career readiness and stated:

The student standards make it very difficult to do anything for simple enjoyment these days. I try to as much as possible [to read aloud for pleasure]. Of course with the demands that we have being an educator these days, you try to as much as possible. I think...and this is personal opinion...the college and career ready push... I don't think we fully grasp what that means. I think we teach backwards, like we teach antithetical to what we should be because we focus so much on read and respond. But we don't teach them technique; we don't teach them to appreciate good stories. So everything is read and respond. I just want you to fit within this framework: read and respond. You're basically teaching for a test (Pete, 2017).

As Mr. Pete spoke about the state test, his demeanor changed, and he became very serious. Mr. Pete broached the subject of teaching for a test, and he discussed the impact this has on instruction:

Ah, it drives it. And I understand it, you know, because you have to show end results. And that's the mark by which they measure everyone. So, if you're not meeting the mark, then in someone else's mind you're not truly educated. But my thing is, where do you balance that at? It makes no sense to me that we're not measuring enough by

growth, and just by a letter grade, you know. Because I know a lot of people who do well letter grade wise, and then cannot make it in a real world setting, nor can they make it in a college setting (Pete, 2017).

Mr. Pete's frustration was evident by his facial expressions, as he continued to talk on the topic:

I understand that crunch, being an educator, you know because everything is data driven and test score driven these days. At the end of the day, do you want someone who can just make a score on a test, or do you want a truly literate, fully functional, competent person? Teachers want to do what's right for the student. I know I do, but teachers feel like they're handcuffed to a lesson plan or some test practice. We fail to realize that a lesson plan has the word plan in it, so it's a plan. It can change. And as a professional, you should be able to adapt that lesson plan in real-time to effectively address the needs of your students, but we just can't do that (Pete, 2017).

Mr. Pete described how some of his students tend to read aloud during testing and explained how he has to handle those situations when administering the state tests:

I've had students read aloud, and unfortunately, it's almost as bad for me...I feel bad at least that I have to stop them sometimes because they're reading aloud during a test. I have to tell them you can't read aloud right now. They'll respond to me, and say, "I know Mr. Pete, but I have to." And I understand their need, but I don't have a choice. I have to stop them. So, here's their teacher who reads aloud to them telling them that they can't read aloud [shakes his head] (Pete, 2017).

The above data appeared in Mr. Pete's first interview. While I was unsure if this discussion was relevant to the study at the time of data collection, I emailed a follow-up question

on testing to Mr. Pete weeks later. The question was framed to focus his attention on the use of read-alouds as it pertained to district mandates or state testing. I asked whether it had any effect on his read-alouds, and if so, how. He responded:

State testing definitely affects what I do, considering that students will not be read to, unless they have that accommodation. So I realize that they will have to read on their own, and I have to give them the necessary tools to do so, which again goes back to my read-alouds. I attempt to demonstrate fluency and model effective thinking as well as vocabulary acquisition. But of course, I have to teach them how to read and respond.

That's why you saw those questions that I used with *Hatchet*. I would include more read alouds just for fun if this testing consideration was not there (Pete, 2017).

Near the conclusion of Ms. Scott's first interview she was asked how she would defend her decision to utilize read-alouds with her eighth graders if she was asked by an administrator or anyone else. Ms. Scott did not answer. She looked down at the floor, and after a couple of minutes, shrugged her shoulders. Again, she was asked, "What would you tell them?" Still, there was no answer; she sunk down a little in her chair and continued to look at the floor. She was told to think about the question, and it would be discussed at the next interview.

Ms. Scott then asked if she could ask a question off the record¹. She asked if I thought state testing would ever go away. By this time in the interview, the participant looked frustrated; she had a straight face and was sitting slumped in the chair. She then explained why she asked the question about testing:

It's just that I don't feel like I teach them anything anymore. All we ever have to do is prepare them for the test. Seriously, we do practice tests all of the time. In the computer

¹ During data analysis, the participant gave consent to include this information in this study.

lab, practice tests. All of our tests have to look like the state tests. It's just aggravating. If they would let me just teach them, they'd probably do better on the stupid tests (Scott, 2017).

During the second interview when the question regarding how she would defend her use of read-alouds to an administrator was asked again, she did not immediately give a response. She smirked as if she knew the question was coming but was hoping that it would not. She then threw her hands up in the air and responded:

I don't know. I really don't know. I don't think my principal would be happy if he came into my classroom and saw me reading to my students. They're eighth graders; they should be reading on their own. I know this, but if they can't do it, they just can't. I'd rather them get something from these stories by listening to me than not getting anything at all. It's the same thing I said last time; if it's not preparing them for the test, then it's not good (Scott, 2017).

In an effort to reassure the participant, I reminded her of all the positive reasons she chronicled regarding her read-alouds during the interviews. Ms. Scott was told that those were her defenses for using read-alouds, and as a trained professional, she has the expertise to utilize what she feels best meets her students' needs.

Student Participants

In order to best describe the experiences students had with read-alouds, I collected interview data from six student participants who were selected based upon the teachers' recommendations. The teachers asked for students who would be willing to talk to someone about their experiences with read-alouds. It was requested that each teacher recommend three students representing varying levels of learners (low, average and high) and that at least one male

and one female be selected. Mr. Pete reported, however, that none of his female students expressed an interest in participating. After obtaining parental consent and student assent to participate, I conducted two interviews with each student. The initial interview followed the protocol, and the follow up interview centered on the responses the student shared initially. Some questions were asked in order to clarify their experiences and delving questions emerged from the transcription process. Table 3 gives demographic information on the students. Following the figure, a description of each student is given, a synopsis of the data analysis is provided, and the themes that emerged from the student data are discussed.

| Pseudonym | Teacher | Grade Level | Learner Classification | Ethnicity | Gender |
|------------------|----------------|--------------------|-------------------------------|------------------|---------------|
| Jack | Ms. Scott | 8 | Low | Black | Male |
| Kim | Ms. Scott | 8 | Average | White | Female |
| Clint | Ms. Scott | 8 | High | White | Male |
| Kade | Mr. Pete | 6 | Low | Black | Male |
| Jake | Mr. Pete | 6 | Average | White | Male |
| Larry | Mr. Pete | 6 | High | White | Male |

Table 3. Student Demographic Information

Jack

Jack is an eighth-grade student in Ms. Scott's reading class. He is a Black male who is noticeably taller than most of his classmates. Jack was classified as a low learner by his teacher and he mentioned in the interview that he failed once in elementary school. Jack was talkative during the interviews; however, he made little eye contact.

Kim

Kim is an eighth-grade, White female student in Ms. Scott's class. She was classified as an average learner. Kim disclosed that this was her first year at this school. She was somewhat shy and often answered with body motions such as nods and shrugs rather than verbalizing her responses.

Clint

Clint is also an eighth-grader in Ms. Scott's class. He is a White male who is much shorter and smaller in stature than his male classmates. Clint was classified as a high learner by Ms. Scott. He spoke with a louder voice projection than the other two participants from this class. He smiled often during his interviews and spoke with confidence.

Kade

Kade is a sixth-grade Black, male in Mr. Pete's class. He is smaller in size than his classmates and wears glasses. He was classified as a low performing student by his teacher; however, in the interviews, Kade spoke with confidence. Kade was very animated during his interviews.

Jake

Jake is a White, male student in Mr. Pete's sixth grade class. Jake also is smaller than most of his classmates and wears glasses. He was classified as an average performing student. Jake did not make much eye contact during the interviews and often shrugged his shoulders or nodded in response to questions.

Larry

Larry is a White, male student in Mr. Pete's sixth grade class. Larry, too, wears glasses. He is average in size compared to his classmates. He was classified as a high performing student

by Mr. Pete. Larry spoke with confidence during the interviews and was able to elaborate on Mr. Pete's use of read-alouds. He was very matter of fact when responding to questions.

Analysis of the Student Data

I conducted two one-to-one interviews with each student to gather the students' descriptions of read alouds. Interviews took place on the school campus during non-instructional times that included when the students were in the computer lab and elective courses. The focus of these interviews was on the students' experiences with teacher read-alouds, including their descriptions and feelings.

Coding

As with the teacher data, I open-coded twelve transcriptions following two approaches. First, each transcript was coded twice in isolation, and then transcripts were combined for coding through horizontalization. This process resulted in a total of thirty-five identified codes, with the most often repeated ones being interest, comprehension, enjoyment, life lessons and vocabulary. Codes were then analyzed with their accompanying data to create categories.

Categories

The thirty-five codes were combined to form categories that best represented the students' descriptions of read-alouds. Analyses resulted in ten categories that ranged from attention grabbing to schema development. The categories were synthesized to formulate four themes to describe the students' experiences with read-alouds.

Themes that Emerged from the Student Data

Four themes emerged from the analyses of the student interviews and observations. These themes illustrate the students' experiences with read-alouds.

1. The students viewed read-alouds as an enjoyable experience.

2. Read-alouds aided the students in their independent reading and encouraged them to read independently.
3. Students described read-alouds as a learning experience.
4. Read-alouds led students to reflect and make personal connections to characters and events within the stories.

Theme 1: Read-Alouds as an Enjoyable Experience

Each of the six student participants was asked if they prefer to read alone or have their teacher read aloud to them, and they all indicated that they prefer the teacher read aloud. When questioned why, the students had different answers, but analysis of the data indicated that despite these differences, the students' descriptions all equated to read-alouds as being a pleasurable experience. Kade compared Mr. Pete's reading to a video of a little girl reading the same story, and he felt the reader on the video read too fast and did not make it fun like Mr. Pete. He explained, "Well, Mr. Pete...he knows how to change his voice better and stop when he needs to. He just makes it fun for us."

During Larry's interview, he too mentioned listening to a story read from a computer program and said, "If you get the computer, then we'd just go to sleep, but with him reading aloud...how he makes it fun and interesting. That he can change his voices like different characters. I just like that." He explained that several students put their heads down when the computer is reading, and went on to say, "But with Mr. Pete reading, I wouldn't do that because he makes it all fun and all." Larry expressed his belief that because Mr. Pete tries to make reading fun for them, and it could motivate some students to improve their grades. "And then, with Mr. Pete, he makes it more fun and wants us to do more. And so, it gives some of like our...like low testing students...want to stay up and try to get better grades," he explained.

During his interview, Larry spontaneously recalled another teacher in his middle school reading to him. She was a teacher in another department who read *The Cajun Night before Christmas* to his class. Larry described the event:

She read it in a Cajun accent a little. The story was interesting because whenever it would get to a point, she would like...her voice would get high, so it would make us laugh and the book was good (Larry, 2017).

Larry's interview revealed that he enjoyed teacher read-alouds from multiple teachers and felt they enhanced his classroom experience.

Jack said he enjoys Ms. Scott's read-alouds a lot, and his favorite book read this year was a children's book. Although he could not recall the name of the story, he was able to describe it. He said:

It had like...like a lot of words that...you know...sounded...they rhymed. The words rhymed. And she made it funny because she made faces 'cause some of the words weren't even real words. But it was fun...a funny time (Jack, 2017).

Jack's descriptions of the story matched Dr. Seuss' style of writing, so he was asked if Dr. Seuss was the author. He confirmed that it was, but he still could not recall the book's title. Ms. Scott mentioned reading aloud several Dr. Seuss titles earlier in the school year, and the multitude of titles may be a factor in Jack's inability to recall exactly which book title he was referencing.

Clint described feeling relaxed when Ms. Scott reads to the class. He explained that the times Ms. Scott reads aloud gives him a "break on the brain." With a smile on his face, he shared:

It makes me feel kinda like relaxed because whenever there's big words, I don't have to stress on pronouncing them or knowing them. I can just relax and let her read and explain

it to us. Sometimes we need that. Like it doesn't put as much stress on us whenever she reads. You can just relax and enjoy the book, and I do...you know...like it (Clint, 2017).

While no particular thing was said by any of the students during the observations of both Mr. Pete and Ms. Scott's classes, their behaviors indicated they liked the teachers' read-alouds. All students seemed to be paying attention; they were either watching the teacher or following along in their books.

Theme 2: Read-Alouds as an Activity that Aids and Encourages Independent Reading

The students revealed that teachers' read-alouds serve as an aid to their own independent reading. While some students spoke of specific behaviors they were able to perform independently as a result of teacher read-alouds, others described how read-alouds help them identify new books they wish to read independently.

Kade explained how Mr. Pete's read-alouds help him with the pronunciation and meaning of new words:

Well, when you really paying attention, you'll come across words that you don't really know how to pronounce, and you don't really know the meaning of, and then when the teacher is reading it to you, you learn how to pronounce it and what the meaning is (Kade, 2017).

The assumption is that Kade's attention to text during the read-alouds enabled him to identify these unknown words. When asked how Mr. Pete helps him to understand the meaning of new words, Kade responded, "Sometimes he just tells us what it means, and like...well...sometimes he asks us if we could tell him." Kade was asked if he ever volunteered to share word meanings during lessons, and he responded, "Not too...well, sometimes I do if I can figure it out." He then added, "Then you can learn how to like use it in your own sentences." Expounding on the

usefulness of newly learned words, Kade expressed, “Well, I could use it to write, but most times...I just mean...well...when I see the word again, I just know it. Like if I’m reading.”

Kade mentioned that he likes to read stories written by the same author as the books Mr. Pete reads aloud in class and explained why by saying, “Well, sometimes when you read a book with the author and then read another book with the same author...it like...you kind of know what to expect already. And then...like...most authors don’t change their ways.” According to Kade’s responses, read-alouds help him recognize words when he reads independently and lead him to find books in addition to those in the read-alouds by identifying the authors.

One activity Larry enjoyed was being introduced to the author’s life prior to listening to the author’s book. Regarding Gary Paulsen, the author of *Hatchet*, he said, “It’s fun to get to know about the author and what happened in his life.” Larry distinctly recalled that Paulsen was not a good student or reader as a child, details he learned by watching a video on Paulsen’s life. Larry expressed an interest in reading more books by Paulsen because the novels Mr. Pete read by him were interesting and funny. Although Larry acknowledged that he has not had the opportunity to do this yet. Mr. Pete confirmed that he introduced *Brian’s Winter*, *Brian’s Hunt* and *Brian’s Return*, in the event his students wanted to read more of Paulsen’s books.

Larry also acknowledged that Mr. Pete’s read-alouds help him when he reads on his own. When asked to elaborate, he described Mr. Pete’s use of different voices and sounds when reading:

Like he can go from high pitch to low pitch, and then he’ll let us do it ourselves in some of the stories that we read because we had a play, and...oh...we had to also do some sounds. We had to do the sound of a heartbeat, and some of us did a pencil tapping, and some of us did like bomp, bomp...like that noise (Larry, 2017).

The use of different voices during read-alouds makes Larry want to read more. He said, “Like he makes it interesting and fun to make us want to keep on reading books.” When reading independently, Larry is able to use different voices for the characters in the story. He shared, “I hear the different voices in my head when I read by myself.”

Jake noted that he checked out the novel, *Holes*, after Mr. Pete had read it aloud in class at the beginning of the year. He explained, “It was like...like last month. I was at the library, and I saw a book that he had read to us, and I decided to like read it again.” Jake said it was easier for him to read on his own because it had already been read to him, and after being asked if the book was boring now that he knew the ending, Jake responded:

Not really because I forgot some of it. The only thing I remember is like the first and second chapter because he only read like half of the book or more. We didn’t read the last three, so that’s why I thought I’d keep reading it to see what the last three said (Jake, 2017).

He shrugged his shoulders when asked why he thought Mr. Pete had only read part of the book, but then, with a giggle he said, “I guess he wanted to see if we’d finish it, but I didn’t tell him.” Reading only a portion of a story was not an intentional practice of Mr. Pete’s; however, he acknowledged that it happens occasionally:

Sometimes I don’t finish a book when I’ve started to read as a time filler or place holder, especially with classes being on different schedules or one being more behind. As a result, I just tell them that if you want to know how the book ends, you will have to read it for yourself (Pete, 2017).

Pacing charts within his school dictate the order and times in which the Louisiana Student Standards are expected to be taught, and it is expected that teachers keep different sections of

classes on the same schedule. The result of the school schedule is that Mr. Pete unintentionally reads the beginnings of books but does not finish.

Jake shared that Mr. Pete's read-alouds help him pronounce words accurately when he reads independently, and he believes word recognition is one of the reasons Mr. Pete reads to the class. He explained, "Because whenever I would read it with or follow along with him, I know how to pronounce some of the words that I never heard before." Jake continued to describe how this helps him when reading alone by saying, "Like whenever I would read it...like the same thing with the vocabulary...so when I read a different story, and it has that word, I know how to pronounce it, and it's easier for me to read it." Following along in a copy of the story while it was being read aloud enabled Jake to see the words as they were being pronounced.

All of Ms. Scott's students said that read-alouds help them read independently; however, only Jack elaborated as to how they help him and his classmates. He said, "Read-alouds...they like...help you. They help you a lot. Like it helps you read. When you don't know a word, but you heard her say it before, then you'll know it." He went on to say, "It helps like...like...the class. You can like be a better reader." When he was asked to share anything specific he is better able to do because of read-alouds, Jack looked up at the wall and squinted his eyes like he was thinking. Then he responded, "It just helps us all. When we hear her, it just helps...like...like really know what to do when we read." Although Jack had a hard time articulating what particular skills are improved through the teacher read-alouds, he did feel they help him when reading independently.

Mr. Pete's students' responses supported the theme of read-alouds aiding in their independent reading more than Ms. Scott's; however, in the interviews, all of the students agreed the read-alouds were helpful. His students were better able to identify specific behaviors such as

recognizing unknown words and using proper phrasing as behaviors they were able to perform independently. Mr. Pete's students' responses indicated they were more encouraged to seek books to read independently due to the read-alouds.

Theme 3: Read-alouds as a Learning Experience

In each of the interviews, the student participants described learning from their teacher's read-alouds. While the students each described their own learning from the read-alouds, there were similarities among the types of things learned. This theme is organized per each individual to capture the nuances of the students' expression.

Jake. Jake first described how read-alouds help him with unknown words by saying, "It just helps me know some words that I didn't know, and that helps me understand the story better." Jake continued to say:

It's easier than me reading it by myself because when he...whenever he would read it...some of the words, I really couldn't pronounce them. So when he read it, I can pronounce it. You know what it is now (Jake, 2017).

When Jake was probed to describe what Mr. Pete does to help him know the words, he responded, "He really doesn't have to do nothing. He just pronounces it, and that's...I just understand them when he says it." Not only did Jake mention how read-alouds help him with unknown words, but he also thought his classmates benefited as well. He explained, "Because whenever Mr. Pete would read, it would be easier for all the other kids to understand what he was saying...like the harder words. You know?"

Mr. Pete's read-aloud of *Hatchet* taught Jake various survival skills he did not know beforehand. He noted, "If you were ever alone in the woods, you could make a fire to help signal people." Jake admitted that he does not go into the woods near his house alone, but if he would

ever find himself in a similar situation, he now knows what to do. Jake shared other uses of fire and said, “The fire could...it could keep you warm too. You need heat if you stuck in the cold.” Jake revisited creating a signal by stating, “You can also use a mirror. If you were flying over, you could use a mirror, and it would reflect onto the plane or a helicopter, and they would see you.” In response the question whether he learned survival skills from other stories read aloud, he shared, “No. Not really. [shakes his head] This book was just pretty cool. It like...it tells you about this stuff, and it’s good to know.”

Kade. Kade felt he learned new words from listening to Mr. Pete’s read-alouds as well. He mentioned:

They help me put down these words better that I never knew. Because most of the time, if you see a word in a book, you’re probably going to see it again. Most of the time you will see it again (Kade, 2017).

After letting out a sigh, he went on to describe what Mr. Pete does to help him understand new words:

Well [puts his hand under his chin and pauses]...like, when there is a big word that none of us knows, he probably is going to stop at the end of a sentence or a paragraph and ask us to repeat it. And then, tells us the definition and stuff like that (Kade, 2017).

Kade used the word *fluent* to describe Mr. Pete’s reading. He said, “I can tell you it’s better than with the students reading because with the teachers, they’re more, they’re better, fluent readers than the students. So, it’s better for the students to understand.” He shared that he prefers read-alouds to reading on his own and provided the reasons why:

Well, first thing, the book kind of took a long time. If he reads it to me, he probably gonna get it done faster, and I’ll get more information than me just reading. And he’ll

teach me more stuff that I...like I missed. Things that I didn't understand. He'll teach me. He'll get me to understand those things (Kade, 2017).

When asked to describe the different things Mr. Pete teaches, he added, "It helps me improve my grammar, and then write more sentences better. I can have more stuff to put in essays and paragraphs and stuff like that. More information to put in them." Kade clarified that he felt his writing was better because he knew more things about life from listening to Mr. Pete's read-alouds such as working hard, being nice and following rules. Although Kade could not recall what story taught him about being a hard worker, he described what he learned by saying, "You don't. You don't. You can't get something you didn't earn." Kade described learning information, new words, and how to read with more fluency from Mr. Pete's read-alouds.

Larry. Larry mentioned learning how to pronounce unknown words from Mr. Pete's read-alouds:

And like, with the big words that I can't say. So, if I would read aloud, I wouldn't say them, but Mr. Pete, whenever he reads the words...like...he knows them, so it kinda helps me like get some of the big words that I can't read (Larry, 2017).

Like Jake, Larry also mentioned that Mr. Pete helps the class understand word meanings, and when asked how this is done, he responded, "Sometimes he tells us the definition and tells us how to spell the word too."

Read-alouds also helped Larry with comprehension of stories, and he explained that he thinks this is one of the reasons Mr. Pete reads aloud. He said, "You can't go ahead cause you'll get confused, and it helps you understand the story." He also noted, "He can stop whenever he wants to and explain to us about what we read." When asked why he thought Mr. Pete reads

stories aloud rather than having them read on their own, he responded, “So we can understand it more.”

According to Larry, read-alouds help him have better oral and written grammar. He specifically talked about the function of exclamation marks:

Like...he go to exclamation marks and he'll go WOW! [says this in a high pitch]. Like that and all. And he go high pitch and low pitch sometimes. So I know when I write, if I want something to go high pitch, I can put that mark (Larry, 2017).

He further commented:

Because sometimes I'd say, “How old is you?” and in the book it'd say “How old” or something. And like...just like...like small stuff. Like we...do wrong, just like with...writing your stuff...how we like do stuff wrong, and we put it wrong. Like...if we don't indent paragraphs, in the book, it shows us the indents on paragraphs, so (Larry, 2017).

Finally, Larry mentioned learning skills, both survival skills and soft skills, from read-louds. From the book, *Hatchet*, he learned:

I've learned that you can go approximately a month without food and about three days without water. And that there is bacteria and stuff in not purified water, because I didn't think....I thought it would just have like a little dirt in it, but I didn't think it would have like harmful bacteria (Larry, 2017).

He exhibited his understanding of this concept by describing what one has to do to make water safe to drink by saying, “You have to get like a pan and boil it over the fire.” While illuminating teamwork as a concept learned, Larry said, “People you meet some days won't be your friends, but in other days, they can help you when you need them.” Appearing confident in his new

learning, Larry described all of these concepts in his first interview, speaking without interruption and using an authoritative voice.

All three of Mr. Pete's students described various concepts learned from listening to his read-alouds. Each student was asked if they felt they would have learned these concepts even if Mr. Pete had not read aloud, and the students all responded negatively. Larry responded that learning these concepts by listening to Mr. Pete read aloud made it easier for him and his classmates.

Kim. While Kim was the least vocal student participant, she had the most to share on what she learned from listening to Ms. Scott's read-alouds. During her interviews and classroom observations, Kim showed signs of being a shy student. She did not raise her hand to answer questions in class, and during interviews, she often nodded her head or shrugged her shoulders in response to questions. However, she was most expressive when sharing her learning experiences with read-alouds. She first described comprehending stories: "When she reads it, I like understand it, like...but when I read by myself like I don't understand it as much." Kim admitted to not being able to comprehend stories well when reading on her own and noted:

That it [read-aloud] helps me when I...when I like have to answer questions about a story because I can't like really comprehend good when I read by myself. So, it's better for me when I get it read out loud to me (Kim, 2017).

Kim mentioned six times during her interviews that read-alouds help her with comprehension; she felt that promoting understanding of stories was one of the reasons Ms. Scott reads aloud to the class.

Help with the identification of unknown words was another proficiency Kim mentioned. She shared, "Like, I can understand what the words mean, but like...when I try to read the word,

I struggle with saying it.” She added, “Because when I’m like reading, I have trouble with words and stuff, but when she does, she like knows all the words.” When asked to explain what Ms. Scott does to help her understand these unknown words, she shrugged her shoulders.

Besides comprehension and word skills, Kim implied that she learned soft skills from the stories Ms. Scott read aloud. In reference to *The Outsiders*, she noted, “It’s about these Greasers and these rich kids who get in a fight, and I kinda like that cuz then after, at the end, they all like pretty much get together.” She confirmed she learned two soft skills from this story; these were “not to judge people by how they look” and “not to get in trouble.” Referencing the book, *A Long Way from Chicago*, Kim shared another lesson learned:

When we read *A Long Way from Chicago*...it’s funny and that’s like...it doesn’t like really relate to my life, it’s just like something...like it tells me not to judge people by the way that they look...kinda like in *The Outsiders* (Kim, 2017).

While Kim was the least vocal of the student participants, she seemed eager to share the concepts she learned from listening to read-alouds. She specifically described comprehension, word skills, and soft skills.

Jack. During one of Jack’s interviews, he was asked how he feels when Ms. Scott reads aloud to the class. Raising one hand in the air as if to indicate his response was somewhat common sense, he said, “It makes me feel like...like we actually learning something...learning new things and stuff.” Jack explicitly cited learning word meanings from read-alouds, but he shrugged his shoulders when asked to describe this learning.

Jack spoke the most about the soft skills he learned from the read-alouds, and when describing times he has thought about the stories read in class outside of the school setting, he noted, “Like...I thought about how like...the book was going to affect like how I’m going to

act.” When asked to explain this, he said, “Never fight because they always fighting. You should just walk away, and prevent like anything from happening. If they would have done that, then that guy would have never died in the story.” Jack also explained how *The Outsiders* helped him understand things in his own life. He shared, “About how like everybody’s equal, and don’t ever judge nobody.” With a shrug of his shoulders, Jack shared how his peers occasionally tease him for not being a good reader.

Clint. Clint described how read-alouds help him with comprehension, and he mentioned that he prefers teacher read-alouds over independent reading:

I would choose read-alouds because it helps you to understand the book more than you just reading it and skipping over words that you don’t know or skipping over or forgetting things that you won’t remember. Or, like if you’re reading a book and you don’t really understand what happened, some people just skip over it or some people just keep reading it and can’t understand it, but if Ms. Scott is reading it to you, she would explain it to you and help you understand what it’s like (Clint, 2017).

An observant student, Clint shared how read-alouds are helpful to his classmates by saying, “They’re very useful to kids that don’t really...who aren’t really good with comprehension or understanding what the book’s about.” When asked his favorite aspect of being read to, Clint noted, “I think it’s the comprehension because it helps people understand, and it helps with their learning, and it helps them grow as a student, and helps them to do better in school.” Since Clint seemed to be describing how read-alouds help other students, he was asked if they are also helpful to him, and he responded by saying, “Yes. She just explains it and helps us...helps us understand it more.”

Clint addressed learning new words during read-alouds by saying, “Like I’ve heard a lot...like...in *The Outsiders*, like they had words I never knew, but she would explain them to me.” He elaborated on how Ms. Scott helps the class understand new words in the stories she reads:

Like...she gives us examples. Like...like if they ever had a word like discombobulated.

If one of us did not know what it was, she would stop where she’s at, mark where she’s at, give us like an example. Like discombobulated means someone or something that isn’t really right...like if something is wrong with the computer, it is discombobulated (Clint, 2017).

Clint was unable to stipulate what story *discombobulated* was in, but he distinctly remembered learning it during one of Ms. Scott’s read-alouds.

Like his classmates, Clint also learned soft skills from Ms. Scott’s read-alouds, and when asked to describe anything he learned because of read-alouds, he expressed:

Like...like if you set your mind to it, you can do it, and other things that I have learned were like if...if I want to do good in school, I have to do it. I can’t let it come. I can’t let it be given to me. I have to do it. I have to work for it, and I think that’s some of the things that the books teaches, and the teachers want us to understand that, and I think that’s why Ms. Scott reads to us a lot (Clint, 2017).

Clint described how the stories Ms. Scott reads motivate him to want to do his best. In reference to *The Real Wes Moore*, Clint smiled and shared, “It kinda inspires me to do good in school, and it gives me a little bit of hope that I can do what I set my mind to.” Furthermore, Clint described learning empathy and how to be apologetic from two of the books read aloud. He described how sometimes the poor have to steal in order to survive in reference to the book, *Catching Fire*:

It helps me to understand like people who struggle aren't really...that like people who struggle...like in the book...like Katniss Everdeen would steal and do things bad, but it was to help her family. It reminds me of people on side of the road. Some people steal, but it's because they need to steal to survive (Clint, 2017).

In reference to *The Outsiders*, he described the importance of apologizing when getting into fights with friends. He shared how read-alouds are an effective method to teach the class how to be apologetic:

I know...I just can't explain it. Like whenever Ponyboy would like get into a fight with his older brothers and things like that, he would always make up with them and not hold grudges. And I mean that kind of relates to my life whenever I get into a fight with friends...like I can't hold a grudge. I have to apologize, and you have to be friends with them (Clint, 2017).

Clint described Ms. Scott's read-alouds as a learning experience for him; he was very articulate in his descriptions of learning. Moreover, there was evidence of his application of the concepts in read-aloud stories to his own life.

Theme 4: Read-Alouds as an Activity that Leads to Reflecting and Making Personal Connections.

During the one-to-one interviews, the students described ways they personally connected to characters in a story or times they reflected on what was being read in class. Clint recalled a time he was riding in the car with his parents thinking about the similarities between the characters, Ponyboy and Wes Moore:

Like one of the main characters, Ponyboy, he was struggling to understand like...like who he was and trying to...he was having a rough time. And in the beginning of the book

we'd listen to for bell work, the...the man [Wes Moore] in the beginning when he was a child was having a rough time with school and in his everyday life. And at the end of both stories, they kind of get, become successful in finding out what they want. That's when I thought about how the two books were like...like kind of the same (Clint, 2017). Clint demonstrated that not only did he reflect on two stories being read to him, but he was also able to engage in critical analysis of similar characters from two stories.

Kade mentioned how he thinks about the stories he hears in class when he lays down at night. In recalling one of these times, he shared, "Matter of fact that was just last night before I went to sleep. I was thinking about *Hatchet*." Reflecting on the main character's situation, Kade wondered, "Like is...is the person going to get back home to his family or will he just stay in the woods for the rest of his life? That's what I thought about."

During Larry's interview, he too recalled a time he reflected on one of the stories read aloud. He explained that it was a story his teacher did not finish reading to him and because of that, he thought about the story for a few days. Although he could not remember the title of the book, he recalled:

It was one of our stories. It was something to do with a dog [taps his finger on the table and looks up]. And I thought like...and it said they were going to do something with the dog, and so I thought about what would they do with the dog. Would they keep it or bring it to the pound and all? (Larry, 2017)

Admitting he had not yet finished reading the story independently, Larry commented he plans to one day. This reflection displayed how he was able to make predictions about a story's ending that had been read to him earlier in the school year.

Ms. Scott's students expressed that they relate to characters in the book currently being read as well as various characters in books she had read earlier in the year. Jack described the relationship he has with his brothers as being similar to the interactions of the characters in *The Outsiders*:

So, when I was living with my brother, he didn't want to like hang with me cause I was so small, and I used to get mad and stuff cause he didn't want to hang with me. And that's how I feel like Ponyboy and them cause they barely hang with Ponyboy. So, I know how he felt (Jack, 2017).

While hanging his head down and staring at the floor, Jack shared how this made him feel by saying, "Like it just made me kind of understand my situation and know I'm not the only one who deals with this."

Pondering events from *The Real Wes Moore*, Clint expressed that when he attempts new things, he always tells himself he can be successful because of this book. He explained:

The books that she reads to us are interesting like the one she is reading to us is about a person who like struggled in his life, and he wound up like going...becoming a very successful person. She is reading it to us because she wants us to get that through our head, get through our head that if we want to do something, we can do it. We don't have to think of ourselves like we can't do it. Like she wants us to believe that we can do it (Clint, 2017).

Clint was questioned further to see if he could give an example of when he has had to tell himself that he is capable of achieving something. The participant did not have to ponder this question as he eagerly stated he does this mostly when preparing to play soccer. He shared, "It just makes me remember to motivate myself to be confident and play hard."

Clint also related characters in the book, *The Outsiders*, to a family in his neighborhood: Like down my street, they have these people that live in a house and they really, like they are husband and wife, but they don't really get along sometime, and whenever they argue. After they argue, they come back together, and they like make peace with each other. It reminds me of *The Outsiders* when they'd fight. Then, they would make up (Clint, 2017).

When asked if he had any idea what prompted him to make this connection, he responded, "When I'm riding down the road with my mom or just walking down the street and see them arguing, I just always think of that." Clint then described a conversation he had with a friend in which they were connecting characters from *The Outsiders* to people they know in the military:

Like...me and my friend, we were walking down the halls after we got out of Ms. Scott's class and we were talking about the book, and we were talking about how...we were talking about the military school because in the book she sends the kids to military school. So, we were talking about military school, and I was relating like one of my friends is in the military. I know a lot of people who are in the military, and my friend knows some too. So, we were talking about that and wondering if any of them went there to get out of trouble (Clint, 2017).

When asked if he knew the reasons any of his friends enlisted in the army, Clint shrugged his shoulders and stated, "I probably wouldn't ask them that. Not if they got in trouble. You know?"

Kim talked briefly about relating to *A Long Way from Chicago*, which was read earlier in the year, and she explained how she preferred this book over *The Outsiders*. When asked if she could explain the reasons she preferred *A Long Way from Chicago*, she referenced a connection she made to the story. Shrugging her shoulders, Kim noted, "Because that kinda like, a

little...kinda related to my life, cause that's kind of how my Grandpa is, how the old woman acts." Giggling, she added, "He's really tough."

Larry connected to *Hatchet* because he is an avid outdoorsmen. When explaining why it was one of his favorite stories, he asserted:

Because we were learning about survival, and I like to go hunting and fishing. So, he had to fish, and he had to survive on his own. And it's basically like a camp out of nothing to do by yourself and just you. It kind of taught you like situations. So, if I had to do some things if I was in the woods by myself, I would know what to do (Larry, 2017).

Larry admitted knowing how to make a fire prior to reading *Hatchet*, but he now knows other survival tips like the need to purify water and how to make a fishing line. Reflectively he stated, "Like I think the next time I'm hunting, I will think of the things Brian did in the story...like how he survived and stuff." Because of Larry's personal interest in hunting, this story offered him the ability to make connections to the character, Brian, and learn new skills that could prove useful.

Ultimately, the students' descriptions centered on aspects of good reading. Textual connections were made during read-alouds that offered opportunities to learn new vocabulary words and track text of a fluent reader. Outside of the classroom, students recalled reflecting on stories read and relating concepts from the read-alouds to either their own lives or to those around them. Moreover, all six of the participants recalled experiencing read-alouds as a pleasurable experience, something known to lead to better reading abilities as well as lifelong reading habits.

This chapter succinctly presented all participants' data. The next chapter discusses major findings deduced from the data, makes theoretical connections, and offers suggestions for future research in the area of read-alouds.

Chapter V

Discussion of Findings

The purpose of this phenomenological case study was to describe the use of read-alouds in middle school classrooms from both the teachers' and students' perspectives. Through this study, I examined how middle school teachers describe their use of read-alouds in their classrooms and how students in these classrooms described their experiences with these read-alouds. Through my analysis, I was able to identify common themes among the teacher and student perceptions by examining the similarities and differences of their descriptions. The results of this study suggest that read-alouds not only increase student engagement and enjoyment in the classroom but also are a valuable pedagogical practice in a middle school setting allowing for expansion of student vocabulary and enhancement of intrinsic motivation to read. This chapter provides a discussion of the findings, the connection to theory, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

Although numerous studies have been conducted on the use of read-alouds in the elementary school setting, research in the area of middle school has been fairly limited (Albright, 2002; Albright & Ariail, 2005; Clark & Andreasen, 2014; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Lapp & Fisher, 2009); Layne, 2015; Marchessault & Larwin, 2014; Meehan, 2006; Verden, 2012). As such, I sought to address the dearth in the research by conducting observations of middle school teachers delivering read-alouds in their classrooms. Unfortunately, these direct observations did not yield as much useful data as I had anticipated; however, valuable findings were drawn from the one-to-one, semi-structured interviews with the teachers and their students in which the teachers described their use of read-alouds, and the students described their experiences with read-alouds in the middle school.

This study answered the research questions: How do teachers describe read-alouds and why are they used in their classrooms? Six themes emerged from the teacher data: 1) The teachers feel that their read-alouds are an enjoyable experience for their students; 2) Conducting read-alouds facilitates teachers' engagement with their students; 3) Teachers can utilize read-alouds to help bridge the gap for struggling readers and promote independent reading for their students; 4) The teachers can utilize read-alouds to address vocabulary, fluency and comprehension; 5) Read-alouds expose students to soft skills and survival skills; and 6). The teachers' delivery of read-alouds is impacted by state testing and district mandates.

Comparably, findings from the student data emerged that described their experiences with read-alouds: 1) Students view read-alouds as an enjoyable experience; 2) The students feel that read-alouds help them with independent reading and can also promote independent reading desires; 3) Read-alouds are described by students as a learning experience; and 4) Read-alouds lead the students to reflect and make personal connections to stories.

Teacher and student data were analyzed separately; however, a horizontal analysis revealed similarities between the two groups' themes. Figure 3 illustrates the alignment of the similarities between teacher themes and student themes.

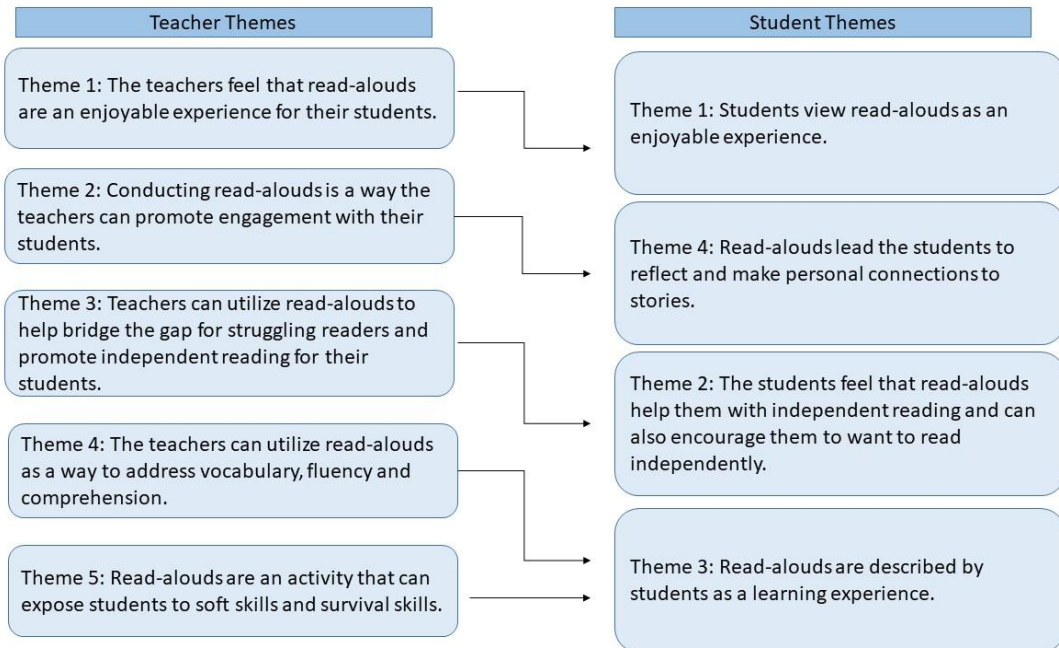


Figure 3: Similarities between Teacher and Student Themes

Only one theme—the teachers’ delivery of read-alouds is impacted by state testing and district mandates—had no comparability to any of the student themes.

Connections to the Conceptual Framework

Bandura’s Observational Learning Theory

This study was grounded in Bandura’s Observational Learning Theory and Rosenblatt’s Reader Response Theory, both of which support the present study’s finding on the importance of read-alouds in middle school. Bandura (1971) asserted that observational learning is most likely to occur through attentional, retention, motoric reproduction and incentive processes. While observations of the classroom were conducted, they were limited to the times in which the teachers delivered read-alouds; therefore, the students’ abilities to apply their learning from read-alouds to their independent reading were not observed. Nonetheless, the students’ testimonies confirmed that read-alouds aid in their independent reading behaviors. The participants specifically cited vocabulary recognition and fluency as two components of reading in which

they feel more proficient as a direct result of their teachers' read-alouds. Even in learning environments such as Ms. Scott's classroom, where fluency lacked proper pacing and expression, students adduced read-alouds as a contributing factor to their own fluent reading abilities. Bandura's (1971) asserted that when a person attends to a model's behavior, he learns more. This is demonstrated in the students' descriptions of read-alouds which were strikingly congruent with the teachers' reasons for using them. Results from this study indicate students were attentive to their teachers' behaviors, and read-alouds with middle school students can lead to increased vocabulary acquisition and reading fluency through observational learning.

Rosenblatt's Reader Response Theory

While Rosenblatt (1978) asserted the stance during a reading transaction "derives ultimately from what the reader does," the reasons teachers in this study read aloud to their students cannot be overlooked (p. 27). As explained by the teachers, read-alouds were conducted in their classrooms as both a teaching experience and a pleasurable one, and their purposes precisely align with Rosenblatt's (1978) descriptions of an efferent and aesthetic stance. The students in this study took on the role of listeners rather than readers, and the transactions that occurred during the read-alouds were moderately impacted by their teachers' purposes for reading aloud. The experiences of the students in this study fluctuated along the continuum of efferent and aesthetic listening. Rosenblatt (1978) explained when a reader or in this case, the listener, takes on an efferent stance, focus is primarily concerned with "what he will take away from the reading" (p. 24). The students in this study cited examples of learning word meanings and life and survival skills, which confirms that an efferent stance was embraced while listening to stories read aloud. The aesthetic stance is described as the "associations, feelings, attitudes, and ideas" that the words within the text "arouse within him" (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 25). All of the

students described their experiences with read-alouds as enjoyable, and they were able to cite examples of making associations with characters in the stories, understanding feelings portrayed by these characters, and relating these concepts to their own lives. Both the teacher and student participants moved easily along the efferent/ aesthetic continuum proposed in reader response theory.

The students themselves and the texts selected for the read-alouds were instrumental to what Rosenblatt (1978) described as the “poem” or the event that occurs when a reader engages with any form of literature. The text—the words, textual features, story events, and themes of the stories combined with the listeners—the students’ schema, feelings and attention all played a role in how the read-alouds were experienced. Jack gave attention to the rhyme in the Dr. Seuss books read that contributed to his enjoyment of the stories, while Clint focused on feeling empathy for others during *The Outsiders*. The incident Ms. Scott shared concerning the misconceptions some of her students had of the term, *wisecracker*, illustrated that what the reader brings to the transaction is of equal importance as the stylistic writing of the author. Although there were similarities among the students’ descriptions, there were also nuances among them. Each student experienced the same read-aloud; however, as highlighted in the Reader Response Theory, “the reading of any work of literature is, of necessity, an individual and unique occurrence” (p. xii).

Existing Research

Previous research on read-alouds primarily focused on the elementary school setting, and the middle school setting has not been given equivalent attention. Verden (2012) asserted that there “is a paucity of research studies available for review, especially strong experimental designs that can be used to make causal claims, as well as qualitative research that adds insight to

what is mostly survey research” (p. 165). Many of the studies conducted in the middle school setting have focused only on the teacher (Albright & Ariail, 2005) or the student (Albright, 2002; Braun, Clark & Andreason, 2014; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Lapp & Fisher, 2009; Meehan, 2006; Marchessault & Larwin, 2014; Verden, 2006) rather than a combination of both the teacher and student experiences. Similarly, they have focused on one specific aspect of the read-aloud rather than the holistic process (Albright, 2002; Clark & Andreasen, 2014; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Lapp & Fisher, 2009; Marchessault & Larwin, 2014), or have focused on only a specialized population of students—those with disabilities, English as a second language, or those classified as low achievers (Verden, 2012).

The present study took a novel approach as it sought to gain holistic descriptions of middle school read-alouds from both the teachers’ and students’ perspectives, and the student participants were selected to represent all levels of learners in the classroom. The recruitment process within the current study identified only two middle school teachers who frequently read literature aloud to students and matched the convenient selection criteria set forth for this case. It is evident that read-alouds are underutilized within middle school settings making continued research in this area challenging. Nonetheless, analyses of data collected from interviews, observations and field notes within this study confirmed findings on the potential benefits of reading aloud to middle school students.

Major Findings

The research question under study was: How do teachers and their students describe the use of read-alouds in middle school classrooms located in South Louisiana? Through the sharing of experiences the teachers and students had with read-alouds, the results from this study yielded three major findings.

The Match between the Teachers' Reasons for Reading Aloud and the Students'

Descriptions of Teachers' Read-alouds

An aesthetic experience. The first major finding is that middle school students gain from read-alouds what their teachers intended. As illustrated in Figure 7, there were similarities between the teachers' descriptions of their use of read-alouds and their students' descriptions of their experiences with them. The teachers cited a desire to offer their students a pleasurable experience with literature as one of the reasons for reading aloud, and in turn, student participants described these experiences as enjoyable. Positive attitudes towards reading can be stimulated through the use of read-alouds (Sanacore, 1992), and Blessing reported in 2005 that read-alouds can be fun for readers of all ages. Student descriptions of read-alouds in the present study support these ideas. Larry and Kade described Mr. Pete's read-alouds as being fun and interesting, and Clint and Jack described Ms. Scotts's read-alouds as relaxing and enjoyable. Echoing the results of Albright's 2002 study with seventh graders, this study showed that students responded aesthetically to their teachers' read-alouds. Contrary to Hodges's (2011) historical study in which she indicated "it is often assumed both by teachers and young people themselves that it [being read to] is something you grow out of as you become an increasingly proficient reader," (p. 19) analyses of the students' descriptions in this study indicated they did not feel they had outgrown the desire to participate in read-alouds.

As described by Rosenblatt (1978), students can read for efferent and aesthetic purposes when they experience a reading transaction, both of which are important in the classroom. Findings from this study indicate that the use of read-alouds in the middle school classroom can encourage students to take on an aesthetic stance as listeners. Rosenblatt (1978) proposed that when a reader takes part in a transaction, taking an aesthetic stance allows the reader to pay

attention to “what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text” (p. 25) allowing the reader to become fully engrossed in the emotions and associations awakened within him. Bandura’s social learning theory identified that people seek interesting models, and even though the teachers in this study were not overly animated during their read-alouds, the students viewed the activity as an enjoyable one. Read-alouds offered students the opportunity to engage with quality literature and provided a pleasurable experience for them.

An aid and motivation to independent reading. The teachers noted that students who identified as struggling readers often did not read independently for enjoyment because of their inadequate comprehension of more advanced texts. They utilized read-alouds as a way to bridge the gap for struggling readers and to enhance their students’ independent reading. Ms. Scott observed many of her students not participating in independent reading earlier in the year or not comprehending what they read on their own. She wanted her students to gain something from the stories she read aloud in class rather than gain nothing at all. Similarly, Mr. Pete felt that some of his students lacked the prerequisite skills required to read and comprehend grade-level materials. He stated, “So as I read, I’m able to fill them with so much because they lack so much skill.” All six of the students acknowledged that their teachers’ read-alouds assisted with comprehension of stories being read.

Additionally, Mr. Pete’s students mentioned wanting to read more books by the same authors as the books that were read-aloud to them. This finding is supported by literature in which Albright (2002) and Meehan (2006) noted that the use of read-alouds can lead to students’ independent reading desires. Freeman’s (2011) study suggested that read-alouds affected students’ independent book choices, and he proposed that “teachers need to make a conscious effort to include read-alouds on a regular basis in their daily instruction” (p. 75).

Mr. Pete incorporated two different activities into his read-aloud times that motivated his students to want to read independently. Prior to reading a selection, Mr. Pete introduced his students to the author of the book. As observed, Mr. Pete showed a video of Gary Paulsen's life in which the author talked about his own struggles with reading in elementary school and shared his love for the outdoors. Mr. Pete also introduced his students to other titles by Paulsen. By allowing his students the opportunity to know Paulsen as a person, Mr. Pete increased his students' connection with Paulsen thereby encouraging students to seek out additional literature he had written. Larry recalled, "It's fun to get to the know about the author and what happened in his life." He particularly expressed an interest in reading more books by Paulsen because he too, like the author, has a love for the outdoors.

The second thing Mr. Pete incorporated into his read-aloud times that encouraged students to want to read independently was sharing only a portion of a novel rather than in its entirety. He indicated that this was not a planned practice but was only done when he had to find activities to occupy one class when another class had fallen behind in their lessons. On these occasions, Mr. Pete advised his students read the books themselves to learn the endings. Mr. Pete explained how he attempts to maintain consistency with all sections of his English language arts classes in accordance with the district-generated pacing charts, and that he uses read-alouds as a filler activity to maintain a cohesive schedule. While reading only a portion of a novel was not done to purposefully encourage his students to read independently, it nevertheless had that effect, and students who would not normally read independently were inspired to read the conclusion of stories. Meeham's (2006) study on the use of nonfiction read-alouds indicated that participants sought similar selections to read independently at the conclusion of the study, and likewise, Mr.

Pete's students expressed interest in continuing to read the same books or books related to the ones read in class.

A teaching and learning experience. Another set of common themes centered on the teachers' pedagogical reasons for conducting read-alouds and the learning students attained as a result from participation in these sessions. Addressing vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency—three of the five components of reading as identified in the Put Reading First study (Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2001)—was cited as a reason both participating teachers read aloud to their students.

Building vocabulary in particular was an important focus of the teachers who delivered read-alouds to their middle school students; this coincides with Albright and Ariail's (2005) study. For example, Mr. Pete developed the meaning of the word *ubiquitous* by relating it to a well-known singer, Taylor Swift. Not only did Ms. Scott develop meaning of new words while reading aloud, she also capitalized on the opportunity to clarify misunderstandings the students had of some words. Students' behavior during one of her read-alouds drew her attention to a particular instance of student misunderstanding of the meaning of *wisecracker* in *The Outsiders*. This scenario exemplified what Rosenblatt (1978) meant when she asserted that a reader's prior knowledge, experiences, and values affect one's interpretation of text. From experience, Ms. Scott's students knew the colloquial meaning of *cracker* to be a white person, and from their prior knowledge of sentence syntax, they knew an adjective comes before a noun and describes it. Hence, the students heard two words not one, and a *wise cracker* was a smart, white person.

Research has shown that reading aloud to middle school students leads to increased vocabulary acquisition (Braun, 2009; Marchessault & Larwin, 2014; Layne 2015), and all six students in this study reported learning new words as a result of their experiences with read-

alouds. During his interview, Clint vividly described an example of vocabulary development and proficiently defined the word he learned. Kade conveyed how words learned from a read-aloud will likely be encountered in other texts as well by explaining, “They help me put down these words better than I never knew. Because most of the time, if you see a word in a book, you’re probably going to see it again.” Teachers in this study purposefully conducted read-alouds to increase students’ vocabulary, and while many of the occurrences with vocabulary development were planned in advance, incidental approaches were utilized as well, which led to all of the students concurring that learning new words resulted from direct experiences with teacher read-alouds.

Another component of reading addressed through the use of read-alouds was comprehension. Reading comprehension was cited by both teachers as a main reason for reading aloud since without it, one is merely word calling. The teachers in this study conducted read-alouds to help their students better understand stories, model effective comprehension strategies and skills, and promote listening comprehension abilities of their students. Ms. Scott referred to read-alouds as a “vehicle” that steers her to what she is teaching, and she mentioned reading both novels and picture books to achieve this. “I can model identifying these skills [point of view, plot or theme] easily from these types of [picture] books because they are interesting and easy to understand.” Similarly, Mr. Pete acknowledged reading aloud multiple types of texts for the purpose of increasing students’ comprehension abilities. In addition to exposing students to aspects of comprehension during read-alouds, the teachers asked questions, a practice known to increase students’ metacognition.

When teachers in this study read aloud, all six students described better comprehension of stories, a finding comparable to Clark and Andreasen’s (2014) study. Kade compared

independent reading to read-alouds and explained that his teacher's read-alouds illuminated details of the story that he may have missed or provided an understanding that he did not have when reading independently. Larry realized one of the reasons Mr. Pete reads to the class is to promote understanding. While explaining how his teacher stops reading to clarify comprehension during read-alouds, he justified that Mr. Pete does this "so we [the students] can understand it more."

Fluency was a component of reading addressed by the teachers during read-aloud and recognized by the students as they listened. The act of fluent reading encompasses an appropriate pace, accurate word recognition, proper phrasing and expression, and a proficient level of comprehension. The teachers in this study cited modeling of fluent reading as one of their purposes for reading aloud to students. Besides demonstrating fluent reading during observations, Mr. Pete also stated:

Sometimes we take for granted the power of speech, like in a read-aloud, the importance of how something is said and read, and the little nuances of our voice. So things like that, and just the way you can convey certain things to students just by the way you say it.
(Pete, 2017).

Both teachers intended to expose their students to fluent reading by having them listen to read-alouds, and in spite of Ms. Scott's fast pace and lack of expression, her students adequately talk about the teachers' goals regarding fluency. Both Mr. Pete's and Ms. Scott's students asserted being able to read an increased number of words accurately as a direct result of listening to read-alouds. Jack shared, "When you don't know a word, but you heard her say it before, then you'll know it."

Exposure to soft skills and survival skills was another reason the teachers cited for reading aloud, and consequently, five of the six students were able to describe their learning in this aspect. The teachers in this study gave similar accounts of the characteristics they seek in the books they use for read-alouds: a book that would interest students and a book to which students could relate. Accordingly, *The Outsiders* was chosen by Ms. Scott because she felt her students could relate to the characters in the story being that they too reside in harsh neighborhoods. The conflicts her students experience in their neighborhoods come into the classroom resulting in student altercations on the school's campus. Using this book for her read-alouds gave her the opportunity to expose the students to soft skills such as making good choices and understanding the consequences of one's actions. Bullying was a topic inextricably linked to the gang activity in this book as well; therefore, Ms Scott was able to teach her students that "you can't just judge them because they look different from you." Thoughtfulness in her book selection made *The Outsiders* an ideal story to address soft skills.

All three students in Ms. Scott's class shared lessons they learned from her read-alouds, which reflected the teacher's intention. Kim and Clint both learned people should not be judged based on their appearances while Jack described how he feels everyone is equal in the world, and people should learn to get along. He also explained how fighting can lead to unwanted consequences.

Mr. Pete expressed the importance of educating students beyond academics by stating, "Sometimes the simplicity of stories are (*sic*) good to espouse things like morals and different other values. So, to teach them how to be a total person, not just a student." According to Mr. Pete, acquainting students to concepts such as right versus wrong, good citizenship, honesty, and the understanding of different cultures was achievable by reading aloud. He believed that by

reading to his students, he equipped them with the soft skills necessary to develop into responsible, intuitive young adults. Considering *Hatchet* was being read aloud at the time of this study, it was inevitable that the majority of skills described by Mr. Pete's students were survival skills. Jack described learning various ways to signal a plane if trapped alone in the woods, and Larry mentioned how long a person could survive without food or water. Larry also expounded on learning the importance of teamwork when one is struggling to survive. Both teachers intentionally utilized read-alouds to expose their students to soft skills or survival skills with positive results as the students described the lessons they learned.

Engagement. The last pair of common themes centered on engagement of the students during read-alouds. In an effort to keep students on task, the teachers asked questions and had the students follow along in their own copies of the books being read. Mr. Pete described engagement of students as his main goal when reading aloud, and Ms. Scott acknowledged the importance of having her students see what she is reading. Questions asked by the teachers offered students opportunities to make personal connections to the stories being read, and the students shared several experiences of connecting to specific characters. Kim thought a character in *A Long Way from Chicago* was stern like her grandpa, and Clint found motivation to do his best in school after learning the struggles of Wes Moore in the *The Other Wes Moore*. Likewise, Jack felt his brothers treat him like Ponyboy in *The Outsiders*, while Larry felt connected to Brian from *Hatchet* because of his love of the outdoors.

Verden (2012) noted, "Students were able to identify with the characters and story lines in the literature and reflect on their own lives as read-alouds occurred" (p. 623). Similarly, findings in this study illustrate how students connected to the various characters in the stories and were able to relate occurrences to their own lives as a result of the teachers' techniques of

keeping them engaged. Findings from Clark and Andreasan (2014) indicated the more students seemed engaged with text, the more they enjoyed read-alouds. It is a plausible assumption that since all six students enjoyed listening to their teachers read in this study, engagement could have been a contributing factor.

The Testing Culture of Schools Affect Read-Alouds

The second major finding in this study is that the fidelity with which teachers implemented read-alouds was impacted by district mandates and the pressure of preparing students for state tests. Hindrances to conducting middle school read-alouds have appeared in several research studies (Albright, 2002; Albright & Ariail, 2005; Hodges, 2011; Sanacore, 1992). Albright (2002) asserted that many middle school teachers feel the practice is inappropriate for use with their students, and Sanacore (1992) explained how middle school teachers feel they lack the necessary flexibility in their schedules to perform read-alouds and teach the required content. Unfortunately, many content teachers perceive read-alouds as a practice meant for English teachers (Albright & Ariail, 2005). Hodges' 2011 historical study revealed "it [read-aloud] is often assumed both by teachers and young people themselves that it is something you grow out of as you become an increasingly proficient reader" (p. 25).

While the middle school teachers in this study have engaged in the practice of reading aloud to their students, they have altered aspects of their methods because of an increase in district mandates and the pressures of state testing. The frequency with which Mr. Pete was able to read to his students for simple enjoyment has decreased as a direct result of the district mandates to teach the student standards in adherence to the pacing requirements provided to teachers. He explained, "The student standards make it very difficult to do anything for simple enjoyment these days." He stated how state testing "drives" instruction in his classroom. Mr.

Pete shared, “Teachers want to do what’s right for the student. I know I do, but teachers feel like they’re handcuffed to a lesson plan or some test practice.” Despite feeling read-alouds provide students with the strategies required to read independently, Mr. Pete also has to prepare his students to answer questions in the same format as the state test, which he referred to as read and respond questions. The pressure placed upon him to do this has impacted the way he delivers read-alouds and has forced him to embed test preparation activities.

Ms. Scott expressed many of the same frustrations as Mr. Pete; however, she had a fear of being caught reading aloud to her students. She was uneasy as she shared that she does not believe her administrator would approve reading aloud to eighth grade students. Fear was likely a factor contributing to the fast pace in which Ms. Scott read. Like Mr. Pete, she expressed frustration with the emphasis put on testing at her school and felt she no longer had the autonomy to instruct students in accordance with best practices.

Arroyo-Romano (2016) asserted, “State and District mandated assessments can have an impact on the delivery and the content of the curriculum in the classroom” (p. 56). In direct alignment with this reality, the teachers in this study altered their deliveries of read-alouds. Despite their training and knowledge of what they know to be effective pedagogy, these teachers were pressured by external factors to focus their attention on test preparation.

Read-Alouds are Appropriate in the Middle School

Another major finding related to the appropriateness of utilizing read-alouds with middle school students can be drawn from the present study. Despite some teachers’ unwillingness to read to their students (Albright & Ariail, 2005) and other teachers feeling that read-alouds are incongruous to a middle school setting (Hodges, 2011), results from this study indicated that students prospered both cognitively and affectively from listening to teachers read aloud. Word

pronunciation and meaning, better grammar, writing skills, content acquisition, and survival skills were cited by students as concepts acquired from read-alouds. Larry elaborated on learning grammar and writing skills, while Clint expressed learning word meaning. Clint shared, “In *The Outsiders*, like they had words I never knew, but she [Ms. Scott] would explain them to me.” Read-alouds have the potential to help students improve their literacy skills, and this finding supports research conducted on the use of read-alouds in middle schools that also concluded students received academic gains when teachers read aloud to them (Braun, 2009; Clark & Andreasen, 2014; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Layne, 2015; Marchessault & Larwin, 2014).

Affective benefits refer to those that influence students’ motivation, feelings, and attitudes, and all of the students recollected affective gains from the read-aloud event. Listening to *The Other Wes Moore* motivated Clint to want to do his best in school and when playing soccer. He recalled, “It kinda inspires me to do good in school, and it gives me a little bit of hope that I can do what I set my mind to.” Likewise, *The Outsiders* inspired Jack to make an effort to get along with others by saying, “I thought about how like...the book was going to affect like how I’m going to act.” All three of Mr. Pete’s students recalled either rereading stories that had previously been read aloud or seeking other books written by the same authors of the read-aloud stories, which evidences that read-alouds affect students’ motivation to read, and concurs with Clark and Andreasen’s (2014) finding that read-alouds motivated students’ reading desires.

All students described their experiences with read-alouds as gratifying in some aspect. Larry and Kade described Mr. Pete’s read-alouds as a fun event, and Kade shared, “He just makes it fun for us,” which indicated a level of enjoyment. Clint felt relaxed when Ms. Scott read aloud, and he expressed, “Sometimes we need that. Like it doesn’t put as much stress on us whenever she reads. You can just relax and enjoy the book.” Findings from this study indicated

that students experienced read-alouds as an enjoyable event, which coincide with Clark and Andreasen's (2014) findings. An important conclusion was asserted by Sanacore back in 1992 when he found that read-alouds have the potential to expose students to the aesthetic side of reading, which can lead to a positive attitude towards reading, something teachers should want for their students.

Limitations

Limitations of a study are defined as “external conditions that restrict or constrain the study’s scope or may affect its outcome” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 103), and Leedy and Ormrod (2016) asserted that “no research project can be perfect, and an honest researcher will not pretend that it is” (p. 45). Although much thought and planning went into this research design, there were evident limitations to the study. The time of the school year in which this study took place was identified as a limitation for an assortment of reasons. This study began in mid-April 2017, and the end of any school year can prove to be a challenging time for both teachers and students. Because each student was interviewed twice during non-instructional times and a third visit was scheduled to member check data from the final interview, transcribing and conducting preliminary analysis of the data collected was performed hastily. Once thorough analyses of the student data had been completed, the student participants were no longer accessible for further questioning or clarification of the experiences shared. A discussion regarding how testing might have affected the students’ experiences with read-alouds could have supported the identified discord between read-alouds and testing. Ultimately, end-of-year assemblies such as award ceremonies and perfect attendance parties proved to make the scheduling of observations and interviews challenging. The observations of read-alouds were also limited to the novels being read at the time of this study; conducting the study earlier in the

school year could have afforded opportunities to observe the teachers reading aloud various types of texts. Inevitably, the teachers and students were exhausted at this time, and the occurrence of state testing only a week prior to the start of the study was likely a contributing factor. The time of the school year in which this study was conducted was identified as one limitation.

Another limitation to this study concerned the site and participant selections. Keeping within a convenient selection, sites selected for this study were within the same school district. Including schools from other districts could have yielded more data to either support or refute the findings. The teachers selected were both English language arts teachers, as no content area teachers who read to their students responded to the initial probe to identify potential teacher participants. Gaining the descriptions of the use of read-alouds from content teachers could have provided further evidence of the usefulness of reading aloud to middle school students. With regard to the student participants, only one female volunteered to take part in the study; she was selected from Ms. Scott's eighth grade class. Eliciting a female's experience with a story featuring a male main character as in *Hatchet* may have provided a useful perspective.

The final limitation to this study was the low number of participants. Hodges (2011) asserted that read-alouds remain primarily an elementary pedagogy, and the challenges to identify more than two middle school teachers who frequently read aloud to their students in my recruitment area supports this notion. The number of participants in this study followed recommendations by Creswell (2013) and Morse (1994) although a larger number of participants would have yielded more data to corroborate the findings of this study and better describe the essence of the read-aloud experience.

Trustworthiness

Stake (2005) noted that findings from research “face hazardous passage from writing to reading. The writer seeks ways of safeguarding the trip” (p. 455). Bracketing my own use of read-alouds helped to minimize any biases that may have interfered with the accurate interpretations of the participants’ experiences. Participants were not prepped in advance of any data collection, and all interviews were conducted in private locations with no one other than the participant and myself present, creating a safe environment under which the discussion of their experiences with read-alouds occurred. Participants were forthcoming in describing these experiences, although Kim, the only female student, remained the least vocal student in this study. Students were given the opportunity to validate the preliminary analyses of their interviews to eliminate any possibility of biased interpretations. Triangulation of the multiple sources of data from interviews and observations increased the credibility of this study although the number of participants was within the lower range of Creswell’s (2015) recommendation of 5 to 25. In congruence with Merriam (2009), the present study’s findings present a holistic interpretation of how the participants described their experiences with read-alouds.

Generalizing the present study’s findings to other school settings is reliant upon “the person seeking to make an application elsewhere” (Guba & Lincoln, 1985, p. 298). The extent to which read-alouds would be beneficial for other middle school students could be similar in varied geographical locations as long as teachers read aloud with high interest literature. Descriptions of participants and the illumination of their voices as they described their experiences with read-alouds contribute to one’s ability to generalize the findings from this study to his or her own classroom and student population.

Implications for Future Research

Limited research on the use of read-alouds in the middle school has been conducted in recent years, and more research would provide stronger evidence supporting this pedagogical practice. This study's purpose was to describe the experiences middle school teachers and their students had with read-alouds, and the limitations of this study uncovered possible avenues for further research. First, a duplication of this study earlier in the school year could have the potential to produce stronger evidence of observational learning. This would allow the researcher to conduct more extensive observations of students and provide additional opportunities to revisit findings resulting from data analyses. There would be opportunities to observe teachers deliver read-alouds using various types of texts.

Studying administrators' views on the use of read-alouds within middle school would be another beneficial study. The teacher participants in this study discussed the pressures of preparing students for state tests, teaching the student standards, following pacing charts, and adhering to district mandates, which altered their deliveries of read-alouds. Determining middle school administrators' attitudes towards read-alouds and their understanding of the value of read-alouds could possibly explain the underutilization of read-alouds within middle schools. Gaining insight into how the pressure of testing and cumbersome test preparation practices affects middle school students' learning and classroom experiences would further support the findings related to the disconnect between read-alouds and test preparation.

Albright and Ariail (2005) discovered that content teachers do not feel read-alouds are appropriate for their classrooms. Studies, that would further investigate content teachers' perspectives on the use of read-alouds, would assist in identifying the precise reasons for their underutilization. Until middle school teachers and administrators fully realize the value of

reading aloud to students and adopt this practice, it is unlikely that sites will exist to do research in authentic classrooms. This study suggests a variety of avenues for future research on the use of read-alouds in the middle school environment, and as Layne (2015) emphasized,

There is a key point I want to make about the research on teachers reading aloud to their students that I believe deserves a solid shout-out, and it is this one. More research needs to be conducted with older students (p. 7).

Conclusion

There has been an increase in the research on teachers reading aloud to older students (Albright, 2002; Albright & Ariail, 2005; Braun, 2009; Layne, 2015). Although the research has minimally increased in recent years, read-alouds are still thought of as a primary school activity. However, results from this study indicated that teachers can find ways to utilize read-alouds within middle school classrooms with positive results. Teachers can use read-alouds to expose students to vocabulary (Beck & McKeown, 2001; Blessing, 2005; Layne, 2015; Santoro, Chard, Howard and Baker, 2008; Zientarski & Pottoriff, 1994), provide a model of fluent reading (Artell, 2017; Layne, 2015), and increase students' comprehension (Beck & McKeown, 2001; Blessing, 2005; Layne, 2015, Santoro, Chard, Howard & Baker, 2008; Zientarski & Pottorff, 1994). Reading aloud can expose students to soft skills that have been cited as skills needed in the workplace (Greene, 2016). Preparing students for life beyond school years is equally important as preparing students for promotion to the next grade level.

Middle school teachers can increase their students' independent reading abilities and desires by reading aloud (Albright, 2002; Layne, 2015; Meehan, 2006). Results from this study indicated the students felt that read-alouds aided in their independent reading; students were also more likely to want to seek out stories that had either been previously read-aloud or had been

written by the same authors as the read-alouds. It should invariably be the goal of teachers to lead their students to be independent readers and learners, and read-alouds can be an activity to promote this (Albright, 2002; Krashen & Brassell, 2003; Meeham, 2006).

Most importantly, teachers can use read-alouds to promote a love of literature and reading: "One of the chief benefits of reading aloud to kids of any age is to favorably affect their attitudes" (Layne, 2015, p. 39). Results from this study indicated that middle school students enjoyed listening to their teachers read-aloud. Students reflected on these read-alouds, and they made personal connections to characters in the stories read aloud. In order to promote life-long readers, teachers can utilize read-alouds to offer students pleasurable experiences and associations with literature (Albright & Ariail, 2005; Layne, 2015; Rosenblatt, 1978).

It is my hope that this study encourages teachers of middle school students to find time to conduct read-alouds with their students and to realize the positive impact they have on students. Read-alouds offer students pleasurable experiences with literature and opportunities to develop vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension abilities. It is also desired that research continue to be conducted in the area of read-alouds with older students beyond the elementary school years. Incorporating read-alouds as a pedagogical practice can enhance students' educational experiences in middle schools.

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Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Adults

Dear _____:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Patricia Austin in the College of Education at the University of New Orleans. I am conducting a research study to explore middle school teachers' descriptions of read-alouds.

I am requesting your participation, which would involve one 30-minute interview and three to four observations of you conducting read-alouds in your classroom. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me at 985-870-4305 or Dr. Patricia Austin at 504-280-6605.

Sincerely,

Alyson Theriot

By signing below, you are giving consent to participate in the above study. This consent also applies to the audio taping of your interview and observations.

Signature

Printed Name

Date

If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, please contact Dr. Ann O'Hanlon at the University of New Orleans (504) 280-3990.

Appendix B: Parental Letter of Consent for Minors

Dear Parent:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Patricia Austin in the Department of Curriculum & Instruction at the University of New Orleans. I am conducting a research study to explore how middle school students describe teacher read-alouds.

I am requesting your child's participation, which will involve two to three 30-minute interviews. Your child's participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to have your child participate or to withdraw your child from the study at any time, there will be no penalty that would affect your child next school year. Likewise, if your child chooses not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. The results of the research study may be published, but your child's name will not be used.

Although there may be no direct benefit to your child, the possible benefit of your child's participation is that the study may promote the use of read-alouds in future classrooms.

The risks associated with participating are minimal and include the possibility of your child feeling uncomfortable talking with me. These risks are not greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

If you have any questions concerning the research study or your child's participation in this study, please call me at 985-870-4305.

If you have any questions about you or your child's rights as a participant in this research, or if you feel you or your child have been placed at risk, you can contact Dr. Ann O'Hanlon at the University of New Orleans at 504-280-3990.

Sincerely,

Alyson Theriot

By signing below, you are giving consent for your child _____ to participate in the above study. This consent also includes permission to audiotape your child's responses during the interview.

Signature

Printed Name

Date

Appendix C: Written Child Assent Form

I have been told that my parents (mom or dad) have given permission for me to take part in a project on teacher read-alouds in the middle school.

I will be asked to answer a few questions about my feelings about the times my teacher read aloud to the class this school year.

I am taking part because I want to. I know that I can stop at any time I want to and it will be okay if I want to stop.

Signature

Printed Name

Appendix D: Verbal Script for Explanation of the Written Assent Form

I am currently a graduate student at the University of New Orleans. I am completing a study to determine how middle school students describe their teachers' read-alouds. Your parents have given permission for you to take part in this study. This would involve you answering some questions that I have about the times your teacher read aloud to you this school year. I want you to know that you can choose not to do an interview with me, or once we start, you can decide that you don't want to continue with it. This form simply says that you want to participate in the interview with me. Do you have any questions? (Read the assent form and collect a signature.)

Appendix E: Teacher Interview Protocol

Researcher: Thank you so much for agreeing to talk to me about your use of read-alouds in your classroom. I know how valuable your time is, and I appreciate you fitting me into your already busy day. I'm going to ask you a few questions about your use of read-alouds, but my hope is that we sort of have a conversation about it rather than just having a question and answer session.

First, I want to find out a little about your teaching experience.

1. Can you tell me about your years of teaching so far (number of years, grade levels taught, schools sites)?

Now, let's focus on your use of read-alouds. I have a list of questions here, but once we start discussing your use of read-alouds, I will just jot down responses where they fit. If you have any questions or want to stop me at any time, please do so.

2. In general, what have you experienced with read-alouds?
3. How would you describe the use of read-alouds in your classroom?
3. How often do you conduct read-alouds in your classroom?
4. Describe the types of stories you read-aloud.
5. Describe your reasons for selecting particular books for particular lessons or classes.
6. In what context do you prefer to conduct read-alouds (time of day, particular lessons, classes)?
7. Describe the types of things you feel you can teach your students through the use of read-alouds. How would you describe your students' learning from your read-alouds (provide specific examples if possible)?
8. What value do you place on read-alouds in your classroom?
9. What factors influenced your decision to utilize read-alouds in your classroom?
10. How do you feel during your read-alouds?
11. Describe how your students respond to your read-alouds.
12. If someone told you that using read-alouds in middle school was inappropriate, how would you defend your decision to do so?
13. Is there anything else you would like to share regarding your read-alouds?

Thank you again for taking the time to share your experiences regarding read-alouds with me. After I read over our conversation a few times, I might have a few more questions for you. Would it be okay for me to visit with you again or possibly email you any further questions I might have? Everything you shared regarding your read-alouds was quite interesting. I look forward to observing your read-alouds very soon. Do you have any questions regarding this study or our conversation today?

Appendix F: Student Interview Protocol

Subject:

Site:

Time:

Hi (student's name)! My name is Ms. Alyson, and I'm at teacher just like (teacher's name) except that I teach big kids. I actually teacher future teachers at Nicholls. I understand that (teacher's name) reads aloud to you quite often, and today I want to talk to you about those times. Please remember that if at any time you want to stop talking to me, you can. Just let me know.

I have lots of questions written down here, but I really want us to talk about (teacher's name) read-alouds. I may write something down now and then because that's what researchers do. If you have any questions while we are talking, you can just stop and ask me. Okay?

1. What have you experienced with read-alouds with (teacher's name)?
2. Have other teachers in your middle school read aloud to your classes? Can you describe your experiences in those classes?
3. I know (teacher's name) read stories to your class. Tell me about this. (How often? What types?)
4. Tell me about your favorite story that (teacher's name) read to you. (What makes this your favorite story?)
5. Tell me about the conversations you and your classmates have with (teacher's name) during read aloud times? (Might have been before, during and/or after the reading)
6. How do you feel when (teacher's name) read these stories to you? (If needed, how did you feel when he/she read stories that you liked? How did you feel when he/she read stories that you didn't like?)
7. What are some reasons you believe (teacher's name) read stories out loud to the class?
8. Tell me about anything that you've learned from listening to these stories read aloud by your teacher.
9. Do you wish (teacher's name) read to you more/less? Why?
10. If you could have (teacher's name) read one of the stories again that he/she has already read, tell me about the story you would want to hear.
11. Tell me about a time you have ever thought about one of the stories/books your teacher has read to you.

Thank you so much for sharing your experiences with me today. I enjoyed our conversation so much. Do you have anything else you want to share or any questions you want to ask? After I read over everything that was said today, I might want to ask you a few more questions on another day. Is it okay if I come back to visit with you another day?

I hope you enjoy the rest of the day, and hopefully I'll see you soon.

VITA

The author was born in Thibodaux, Louisiana. She obtained her Bachelor's degree in elementary education from Nicholls State University in 1993. She worked as an elementary teacher and a curriculum facilitator for Lafourche Parish School System for 10 years. She obtained her Master's degree in curriculum and instruction with a focus on literacy in 1996 from Nicholls State University. Afterwards, she began her career at Nicholls State University as the field experience coordinator in the College of Education. In 2005, she became an assistant professor of literacy in the College of Education at Nicholls State University. This is her current place of employment.